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Prologue

Ashfur dug his claws in the branch. He hissed in annoyance. "I'm going to kill them like you did me," He hissed.

"I'm sorry! I never knew you were that hurt!" Squirrelflight cried.

"Mother! Help!" Lionblaze yowled.

"Help!" Hollyleaf screeched.

"Don't worry kits! StarClan won't take you now!" Squirrelflight yowled. She hurled herself at her kits.

Ashfur stopped her with his paws. "StarClan will take them," He hissed. "It's about time."

"No! Please, Ashfur!" Squirrelflight meowed.

"Pleading me won't help. All I want to see is you suffer," Ashfur hissed. He raised his paw, claws unsheathed. "You will suffer just like me."

"Ashfur!" Squirrelflight pleaded.

Ashfur swung his paw and swiped her across her face. She flew over the flames and into a thorn bush. She screeched with terror as they pricked her.

"Now. On with this," Ashfur hissed. He hurled himself at Jayfeather. Jayfeather yowled with terror. Ashfur kicked the blind gray tom into the flames. His screech of terror was cut off as the flames swallowed him up.

Hollyleaf gasped. "No!" She yowled.

Ashfur screeched and hurled himself at Lionblaze. The golden warrior gasped with horror. Ashfur winced with pain as Hollyleaf dug her claws in his back. Ashfur whipped around and raked his claws across her throat. She dropped limply to the ground and blood poured from her throat. Ashfur hissed and kicked her limp body into the flames.

"Hollyleaf!" Lionblaze yowled. He swiped his claws across Ashfur's ears, but he ducked and Lionblaze missed. Ashfur leaped closer to the hungry flames.

"Kill me! Do it mouse-brain! It's best for me," Ashfur cried. His blue eyes were filled with sorrow.

Lionblaze yowled with delight and he leaped at Ashfur. As he was a mouse-length away from Ashfur, who whipped to one side and Lionblaze's screech of terror was cut off as he landed in the flames. All the cats were dead. The hungry fire-flames had killed them all.

He was so mouse-brained to leap in the flames like that. A true warrior is always ready. Ashfur purred with satisfaction. His blood soaked paw was going to give him away. *I have to wash it off*. Ashfur trotted over to the branch and then broke into a run. He stared back at the hungry flames as they devoured the bodies of Squirrelflight's kits. *It feels good to kill.*

"Ashfur!" A voice yowled. A ginger she cat pinned him down. She raised her paw. "I'm going to-" She was cut off as Ashfur clawed her throat gently.

Squirrelflight stumbled back. "No, don't kill me. And don't tell the clan. If you do, I'll kill you myself," Ashfur hissed.

"The clan will know that you killed those warriors if they see that blood-soaked paw of yours," Squirrelflight replied dryly.

"I'll wash it off mouse-brain," Ashfur hissed. "Let's go."

"Go with you!? After all the pain you've caused me? No way!" Squirrelflight hissed. She leaned closer. "If you think that killing my kin will make me love you, then you're wrong." She turned and

darted for a small stream.

Ashfur stared after her. *Maybe she's right.*

Chapter 1

Ashfur woke up and stretched. Many scents of mice and other pieces of prey flooded over him.

"Hi," A voice meowed. "You're up early."

Ashfur turned to see Berrynose. "Hello kittypet warrior," Ashfur hissed.

"You know cats don't call me that anymore," Berrynose pointed out.

"They will once i'm their leader," Ashfur hissed.

"Ha ha ha good one!" Berrynose chuckled. He purred loudly.

"Save it for later kittypet," Ashfur snapped.

"Kittypet? Can't you respect that word? That's what Firestar is. Keep saying kittypet and he'll pluck out your whiskers!" Berrynose was more serious.

"Firestar may be a leader but whatever he is, he's still a kittypet," Ashfur growled.

"I can hear you making remarks about my mate," That was Sandstorm.

"I can hear you defending your mate," Ashfur hissed. He turned and

stalked out of the den.

"He must of woke up on the wrong side of the nest," Sandstorm purred.

Ashfur hissed in annoyance. "Useless kittypet warriors!" He muttered.

"Hello Ashfur!" Dustpelt meowed. "I was wanting to know if you wanted to hunt with me."

"Sure," Ashfur meowed.

Ashfur stalked a mouse. It was nibbling on a seed. Ashfur leaped and killed it with a swift bite to the neck. The mouse dangled limply from his jaws. Then Ashfur saw Dustpelt stalking a squirrel. Ashfur dropped into a crouch and stalked his prey. As Ashfur got close, he leaped on Dustpelt.

"Hey! Watch out!" Dustpelt hissed. "This is kit-play!"

Ashfur sank his teeth into Dustpelt's neck. The dark brown warrior wiggled fiercely under his paws. Then, the brown warrior fell limp. Ashfur spat out blood. His licked his paw and swiped it across his face. He purred with satisfaction as he stared down at the limp Dustpelt. "Mouse-brain," Ashfur muttered. He kicked the dead warrior's body into a clump of ferns.

Ashfur hurried into the camp. He put his mouse and sparrow in the fresh-kill pile.

"Hello Ashfur," Brambleclaw meowed.

Ashfur turned and his eyes glared with hatred. "Hello," He growled.

"I want you to lead a patrol," He meowed. "Take Dustpelt with you. Oh, and take Mousewhisker and Graystripe. It's a border patrol."

"Dustpelt told me he went hunting today. I- I haven't seen him come back though," Ashfur meowed.

"Since when?" Brambleclaw demanded.

"At sunrise," Ashfur meowed.

"Hasn't....hasn't come back since now?" Brambleclaw echoed.

"I bet you StarClan that he hasn't. He went hunting by himself," Ashfur replied.

"I'll warn Firestar. And stay in camp for now until we find his body," Brambleclaw turned and ran to the leader's den.

"Has anyone seen Dustpelt?" Ferncloud meowed.

"He told me that he was going to hunt by himself," Ashfur meowed.

"Oh dear StarClan! He shouldn't do that!" Ferncloud cried.

"Cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the highrock!" Firestar called.

Ashfur bounded over to the highrock. Excitement was shooting through him.

"Dustpelt went missing. Ashfur told Brambleclaw that he went hunting by himself. I will send out a patrol to look for him," Firestar meowed.

"He has to be alive!" Ferncloud wailed.

Ashfur rolled his eyes. He didn't feel sympathy for his sister.

"Squirrelflight, Brambleclaw, and Ashfur will find him," Firestar announced.

"Come on!" Brambleclaw called.

"Dustpelt!" Brambleclaw yowled. He dug his muzzle into the dead warrior's body. "Who would do such a thing?"

Squirrelflight pushed past Ashfur, gave him a glare, and leaned on Brambleclaw's side. "Only StarClan knows," She meowed.

"We have to report it to Firestar," He meowed. Brambleclaw picked

up Dustpelt by the scruff. "He may have been older than me, but he was a great warrior," He meowed.

"Yeah. He should've been deputy," Ashfur meowed.

Brambleclaw took the lead, but slowed his patrol down as he dragged Dustpelt's body.

"Ashfur," Squirrelflight meowed as she flicked her tail.

"What?" Ashfur hissed.

"I know you killed Dustpelt," She whispered.

"I...I didn't mean to. My... my claws just slipped and I accidentally clawed his throat," Ashfur meowed.

"Excuses excuses," Squirrelflight hissed.

"Go on and bug me," Ashfur retorted.

"Go on and die," Squirrelflight meowed as she gave him a cold stare.

Ashfur's heart dropped and he felt like he couldn't breath.

Days had passed since the clan found out about Dustpelt's death. They had respected the old warrior. Ashfur was planning to kill his next victim when...

"Ashfur!" An angry voice called. Ashfur turned to see Brindleface padding towards him, claws unsheathed.

"Brindleface? B-but Tigerstar killed you!" Ashfur yowled. He then realized that he was dreaming.

"You have to stop killing cats. Dustpelt was your fourth," She meowed.

"Shut up you piece of fox-dung! I'll kill as many cats as I want to," Ashfur hissed.

"Ok. Fair choice. I see that StarClan won't accept you," Brindleface hissed.

Ashfur leaped on his mother.

"Ugh!" Ashfur yowled.

"Ashfur! You'll scare off all the prey!" An angry voice called.

"Sorry," Ashfur hissed. He turned to see Millie. "Sorry, kittypet," He corrected himself.

Graystripe hissed. "No cat can call my mate a kittypet!"

"Sorry, old warrior," Ashfur meowed.

"Sorry doesn't cut it," Graystripe's tail lashed with anger.

"Ashfur, do you want to hunt with me?" Sandstorm asked.

"Sure," Ashfur growled. He unsheathed his claws and his voice was cold. "Only to get away from these kittypets."

"Ok...." Sandstorm sighed.

"Ok!" Ashfur echoed.

Ashfur climbed up a tree. He purred happily when he saw a nest of fat thrushes. A female, male, and two baby chicks were sleeping. Ashfur tapped his paws lightly on the bark. He stalked forward. *This is how I will tear apart Squirrelflight's kin*. He leaped on the male thrush. It cried in alarm. Ashfur clawed its neck and blood gushed out. The male thrush fell limp. Ashfur turned to see the female thrush behind him. It wailed with terror. Ashfur bit its neck. The female thrush fell limp. Ashfur turned to see the two chicks crying out for help. Ashfur slapped his paw on the nest and purred as it fell off the tree branch. The two bird chicks' cries of terror were cut off as their necks broke as they hit the ground, hard. Ashfur purred.

Sandstorm was stalking a plump squirrel.

Great. My prey has come to me once again. Ashfur leaped from the tree and landed lightly on the ground. He stalked Sandstorm. She was a mouse-length from her prey. Ashfur leaped on her back and slammed his paws hard on her back. He heard a nasty crunch noise

and Sandstorm fell limp beneath him. He slashed her throat and blood spilled out. He grabbed her scruff and dragged her towards camp.

Ashfur reached the camp and crept behind the warrior's den. He clawed a hole in the back and gently placed Sandstorm's limp body on a mossy nest. He crept back around the stone hollow and walked into the camp, the two thrushes hanging from his jaws.

"Sandstorm is dead!" A cat yowled.

Chapter 2

Ashfur knew it was Birchfall's voice.

"What?!" Another voice yowled.

Ashfur licked his paw. *And they're to mouse-brained to know that it was me.*

He hurried over to Birchfall, his former apprentice. Ashfur spotted the blind Longtail crouching over Sandstorm's body.

Brambleclaw padded over to Sandstorm. Grief swelled up in the deputy's eyes.

"Sandstorm!" Leafpool yowled. Leafpool and Squirrelflight ran over to their mother's body. Squirrelflight hissed and glared up at Ashfur. Her eyes were clouded with hatred as if she had something to say the the murderous gray tom.

"Sandstorm!" Firestar yowled. He pushed past his clan-mates and gazed down at Sandstorm. "Oh Sandstorm!" He yowled.

"What happened!" Mousefur called. Her eyes went dull as she saw Sandstorm's body. She then collapsed on the ground and went limp. Brightheart rushed over to the limp she cat.

Ashfur remembered when a ShadowClan patrol had killed Cloudtail. Since his death, Brightheart had become a medicine cat, as if she had given up on life.

After the vigil, Ashfur went over to the medicine cat den. Mousefur was motionless on the ground. "She's dead," Leafpool meowed. "She had a heart-attack."

Mousefur lay on the ground. No blood covered her body. Her eyes

were dull as they stared strangely into the sky. *It was time for StarClan to take her anyway*, Ashfur thought dryly. He padded over to the fresh-kill pile and picked a thrush. He turned it over and its white feather's were black as if fire had burned it. A clear voice whispered in his ears as wind ruffled his fur. *Fire turns to ashes and it can kill the clan.* Ashfur didn't know what it had meant. StarClan shouldn't be speaking to him. Ashfur hissed. He turned and headed towards the warriors' den. His eyes glowed with happiness when he saw Cinderheart. The beautiful gray she cat was curled up by herself in a moss nest lined with feathers. Ashfur trotted over. He quietly stepped over her and took place in a different moss nest. He remembered how much the dark gray she cat had cared for him. More than Squirrelflight ever had. Ashfur curled up in the mossy nest. His eyes closed and sleep drifted over him.

Ashfur woke up. He wasn't in the moss nest. He wasn't in the warriors' den. The sky was dark and trees touched the sky. There was orange fungus that grew beside the trees. They glowed and they only seemed to be the only source of light. Ashfur padded deeper into the dark forest. Then a gray tom padded towards him. He was gray and patched with white. His amber eyes were slits and they glowed with joy.

"I am proud of you, Ashfur," He meowed. His spiky fur lay still but his ears were flattened against his skull.

"Who are you? Where am I?" Ashfur asked.

The muscular tom bent his head. "This is The Place Of No Stars. Or you may call it The Dark Forest. I am Thistleclaw."

"Greetings, Thistleclaw," Ashfur meowed. He dipped his head in greeting. "So am I not in StarClan?"

"Mouse-brain! Do not speak of StarClan here!" Thistleclaw hissed.

"Well what am I doing here?!" Ashfur growled. His gray fur stood on end.

"I have come to train you. Sent by our loyal leaders Tigerstar and Brokenstar," Thistleclaw meowed. Two huge tabbies stepped out

from behind him. Their paws were bleached with blood and their claws were unsheathed.

"Ashfur. I want you to kill all of Firestar's kin. If you do this, I will grant you powers that you could ever dream of!" The tabby meowed.

"Tigerstar, I'm not sure Ashfur will believe you. You've never gave anything to any cat," Thistleclaw hissed.

"Don't listen to my former mentor. Ashfur, you could have anything you ever wanted. Deal?" Tigerstar meowed.

"Deal!" Ashfur meowed.

Chapter 3

Ashfur woke up. His mind was racing with thoughts. He had met Tigerstar! Power surged through him. He jumped up and scanned the camp. I will kill Brambleclaw. Ashfur darted out of camp. He knew that Brambleclaw liked to hunt by himself sometimes. Ashfur waited in a clump of ferns. His claws were unsheathed. Then Brambleclaw's scent drifted over him. Ashfur crouched. He kept himself low and out of the wind, so it wouldn't carry his scent out to get to Brambleclaw. Brambleclaw passed Ashfur. No cat will know. Ashfur leaped out of the ferns and onto Brambleclaw.

The tabby's eyes widened. "Ashfur! I'm not a ShadowClan warrior!" He wailed.

"You took everything from me. Now you will pay," Ashfur hissed. He raised his paw, claws unsheathed. He swung his paw down and hit Brambleclaw's throat. Blood gushed out. Brambleclaw gasped in pain. "Mouse-brain. I killed your kits. I killed Sandstorm. I killed Dustpelt," Ashfur hissed.

Brambleclaw's eyes widened. He opened his mouth to speak, but blood streamed down his mouth and stopped him.

"Tigerstar wanted me to kill all of Firestar's kin. I will do what he said. You are part of his kin," Ashfur hissed. He sank his claws into Brambleclaw's throat and the tabby warrior's breathing got raspier.

"T-Tigerstar told you to kill me?" Brambleclaw rasped.

"Yes mouse-brain. Did you hear what I said?" Ashfur hissed.

Brambleclaw gasped in horror. He tried to wail, but all that came out was a low groan.

Ashfur purred as the deputy's body twitched and then fell limp beneath his paws. He kicked the dead warrior's body into a clump of ferns. Ashfur raced to the ShadowClan border. He stepped his paw over the ShadowClan border. Ashfur lifted his other paw. He lifted his head and sniffed. A ShadowClan patrol! Ashfur scented Russetfur, Oakfur, and Crowfrost. Ashfur sprang from the bushes and landed on Oakfur. He bit the brown tom's neck and the ShadowClan warrior fell limp beneath his paws.

"Oakfur!" Crowfrost yowled. "You'll pay for this!" He leaped onto Ashfur and kicked his belly.

Ashfur escaped Crowfrost's grip. The scratches on his belly burned and dripped with blood. Ashfur yowled and raced back to camp.

He tripped over Brambleclaw's dead body. Ashfur hissed. The ShadowClan cats were still following! Russetfur leaped on Ashfur's back. Ashfur shook her off as she bit into his shoulder. Ashfur raced into camp. He shoulder and belly burned and dripped with blood.

"Ashfur! What happened?" Firestar came running over.

"ShadowClan cats were on the border! Me and Brambleclaw fought with them but Oakfur killed Brambleclaw! I killed Oakfur in revenge for his death," Ashfur explained.

Firestar's eyes lit up with hatred. "They killed my deputy? I will attack their camp now!" He hissed. He leaped onto the high rock and called a clan meeting.

Ashfur walked over to join. Squirrelflight joined the group of cats, but stalked far away from Ashfur.

"Brambleclaw and Ashfur were out hunting today. They found ShadowClan cats across the border. They fought with them. Brambleclaw was killed by Oakfur. Mad, Ashfur killed Oakfur and ran back to camp for out help," Firestar explained.

Shocked meows echoed through the camp. "We have no deputy!" A cat yowled.

"But.... I will attack their camp now! I will take these cats: Ashfur, Spiderleg, Brackenfur, Thornclaw, Whitewing, Foxpaw, Icepaw, Cinderheart, Berrynose, Mousewhisker, Graystripe, and Honeyfern. The rest of you can guard the camp. Birchfall and Poppyfrost I want you guarding the entrance. Hazeltail I want you guarding the nursery. I will be fighting myself." Firestar meowed. "Lets go!"

The fighting patrol raced into ShadowClan's camp. The air was thick with their scents. Ashfur lunged for Rowanclaw. The golden warrior yelped in surprise.

"I shall kill you. You are part of Firestar's kin," Ashfur hissed.

"What do you mean? I don't share any of that kittypet's blood!" Rowanclaw hissed.

"Tawnypelt is Brambleclaw's sister. Squirrelflight is Firestar's daughter. Squirrelflight and Brambleclaw are mates. And you are mates with Tawnypelt. Your kits have ThunderClan and ShadowClan blood in them," Ashfur explained.

"Nonsense," Rowanclaw spat.

Ashfur growled and raised his paw. His claws were unsheathed. "Say goodbye!" He hissed. Ashfur raked his claws across Rowanclaw's throat. Blood spilled out and the golden warrior fell limp beneath him. Ashfur hissed as a flame-colored tom sprang on him. "Firestar- what?" Then Ashfur realized that it was Flamepaw. "Oh you pathetic piece of mouse-dung!" Ashfur hissed. "Useless medicine cat apprentice!" Ashfur raked his claws across the tom's throat. The small apprentice fell limp.

"Flamepaw!" A voice hissed.

Ashfur turned to see Tawnypelt standing over her dead son's body. She looked at Ashfur, her gaze filled with hatred.

"I thought you were better!" She hissed. She sprang on him. Tawnypelt raked her claws across his shoulder. She bit his ear and

battered at his belly.

"We came to fight here because Oakfur killed Brambleclaw!" Ashfur lied. "Our deputy!"

"My brother is dead.....?" Tawnypelt meowed.

"Well he is isn't he??" Ashfur hissed. He quickly slashed his claws across her throat. Tawnypelt shivered. She fell to the ground, still alive. Ashfur sprinted off. He found Firestar and Blackstar fighting. Ashfur leaped on Blackstar.

"You!" He hissed.

Ashfur raked his claws across the big white tom's shoulder.

Firestar leaped on Blackstar. His weight crushed him. Firestar sliced Blackstar's ears. Blackstar hissed.

Ashfur watched, his eyes glaring.

Firestar lunged for Blackstar and bit into his neck. Flame against white, they tumbled on the ground. Firestar's claws were wedged with white hair. His eyes gleamed. Blackstar fell to the ground, still alive. Firestar glared at Ashfur and ran off.

Ashfur slipped between blood-drenched ferns. Mousewhisker was a fox-length away. He was battling with Smokefoot. The black tom raked his claws across the ThunderClan warrior's throat. Mousewhisker fell to the ground, limp. Smokefoot raised his head and looked at Ashfur. His face was expressionless: eyes dull and ears pricked and claws unsheathed.

Ashfur ran over to Thornclaw fighting a ShadowClan apprentice. Thornclaw was one of his followers. Then a voice rang though the clearing.

"ThunderClan, retreat!" Firestar yowled. He limped over to Squirrelflight. "We leave in peace," He hissed.

"I'm not sure you will," Blackstar hissed. "I have lost a life because of you," He glared at Firestar with all the hatred Tigerstar had for

him. "Leave my camp and my warriors alone. You've no right to come strolling into my camp like you own it. Firestar, you always act like you own everything."

"Your patrol was found hunting in our territory and they killed Brambleclaw, our deputy!" Firestar hissed. His fur was torn and blood stained his body. His eyes were thin chips and they blazed like fire. "ShadowClan has no respect for borders!"

"Like you're any better!" Blackstar hissed, his ears flattened. His tail was lashing from side to side. He looked down at his warriors, amber eyes hostile. "Have any of my patrols been hunting on their territory?"

The cats shook their heads. "Me and Russetfur were patrolling our border when a gray ThunderClan warrior crossed our border. He killed Oakfur. We chased him until he tripped," Crowfrost called. His shoulder was bleeding heavily.

"So it seems that my patrol wasn't inside your borders!" Blackstar hissed. "Some cat must have told you wrong!"

"Great! Lie on Blackstar. The black-hearted coward you are!" Firestar meowed. His green eyes blazed with hatred.

"Firestar!" A cat called. Ashfur turned to see Berrynose. He was holding the dead Mousewhisker by the scruff. "He's dead."

"Now you know not to mess with ShadowClan. We already know that you are weak," Blackstar meowed. "Some of your cats have died."

"Some of yours to. Rowanclaw and Flamepaw!" Ashfur called. The golden warrior was lying in a pool of his own blood. His claws were unsheathed and his eyes starred up into the sky.

"Leave!" Blackstar called.

"We will. But the scars of this battle will never be forgotten. We are prepared for an attack from you. And, don't try to take our territory or we'll be forced to kill off your warriors!" Firestar growled.

"Ah, kittypet, I'd like to see you try!" Blackstar snapped.

And with that, Firestar turned and stalked away, head low, eyes burning with defeat.

"What will we tell Hazeltail and Daisy?" Berrynose was whispering.

"Well.... we have one cat to blame," Firestar hissed. He turned his head and glared at Ashfur. "You lied."

"I'm sorry, Firestar. I just wanted ShadowClan to know that we are not weak," Ashfur meowed.

"You got one of our warriors killed!" Firestar hissed. "As for that.... no fresh-kill for a day!" Firestar growled. He limped ahead of Ashfur.

"Thanks a lot," Berrynose hissed. He trotted ahead of him.

What I did was wrong. I'm more mouse-brained than a dead mouse.

"Hey Ashfur!" Cinderheart padded over.

Ashfur felt her tongue rasp between his ears.

"You look down," She meowed. "What's bothering you?" She asked.

"I..... well.... Firestar accused me of lying," He meowed.

"Did you?" She asked.

"I'm sorry, but yes," Ashfur rasped.

"I don't hate you," She meowed. "I was thinking of the future. Our future. Our kits. Our kin," Cinderheart meowed.

"I'd want to have kits with only you," Ashfur meowed. Then he thought about Squirrelflight. The flame-colored she cat would tear him to pieces if he wanted to have kits with her. Squirrelflight wasn't over it yet. She still hated Ashfur. Even after he killed her kits in the fire.

"Really?" Cinderheart purred.

"Our kits would be the best. The strongest. The bravest. The best." Ashfur purred.

"Great. Because I'm expecting yours," Cinderheart meowed. Her voice was filled with love.

Ashfur's heart dropped. "W-what?" Ashfur meowed. He stopped dead in his tracks. Thunder cracked overhead as they padded on. Rain poured down and tickled Ashfur's ears. "Now?" He asked. "When will they be born?"

"In a couple of moons," Cinderheart replied.

Ashfur flicked his ear. His belly growled. "I'm starving!" He hissed.

"Well when we get back to camp we can eat together. I'll be moving to the nursery when we get back though," Cinderheart meowed.

Ashfur winced as thunder cracked through the sky.

"Quick! We must get to shelter!" Firestar meowed. "Before the storm gets any worse!"

Ashfur's heart stopped. What if the storm got worse. They were almost to the border.

Rain poured more heavy now and it echoed loudly in Ashfur's ears. The clouds were dark and they were soaking with rain.

"I don't want our kits to die," He meowed. He touched his tail along Cinderheart's flank.

"I know," Cinderheart meowed. "I'll be proud of them!"

"Me to!" Ashfur meowed. His paw slipped in mud. "Oops."

Cinderheart let out a mrrow of laughter as he tripped and landed head first into a mud puddle.

The fighting patrol raced into camp. Thunder cracked the sky as lighting crashed down. Ashfur saw Foxpaw at the fresh-kill pile.

"I'm going to get these scratches fixed," Ashfur meowed. He darted toward the medicine cat den. Firestar was there.

"Hello Leafpool," Ashfur meowed. He looked over to Squirrelflight curled around two tiny kits. "Squirrelflight!"

"What? Oh, Ashfur, have you met my kits??" Squirrelflight asked.

"No, I haven't. Who is the father?" Ashfur questioned.

"Brambleclaw. But the kits won't see their father. He got killed by Oakfur, as you said," She replied.

"Names?"

"Alderkit for the ginger tom and Sparkkit for the golden she cat," She meowed.

"Well..... Cinderheart is expecting my kits," Ashfur meowed. He turned to Leafpool. "Can you get me a piece of fresh-kill? I can't walk. My paw hurts."

"No! I told you that you couldn't eat until tomorrow!" Firestar hissed. "Your punishment for lying!"

"Oh, right," Ashfur growled.

"I will appoint a new deputy," Firestar declared.

"Firestar, maybe you should wait. Your shoulder is really bad," Leafpool meowed to her father.

"I *will* appoint a new deputy and then I will rest," Firestar meowed.

"Fine! Just try not to walk on it!" Leafpool called.

Firestar nodded and limped out of the den to the high rock.

Ashfur winced as Brightheart rubbed some herb juice on his pad.

"Just keep still!" She hissed. "It'll hurt more if it's infected!" She meowed.

Ashfur kept as still as possible. He kept twitching.

"All cats old enough to catch prey join here beneath the high rock!" Firestar called.

Ashfur couldn't join. He could only watch from the medicine den.

"Mousewhisker has died in the battle with ShadowClan. We also have no deputy. This will weaken our clan. Now I say this before the body of Brambleclaw, so that his spirit may hear and approve my choice. Brackenfur will be the new deputy of ThunderClan!" Firestar meowed.

"Brackenfur!"

"Brackenfur!" Sorreltail yowled the loudest.

"Brackenfur!"

"Can you believe it? My father is going to be deputy!" Cinderheart meowed.

"I wish my mother was made deputy," Ashfur purred. He remembered how Tigerstar had killed his mother, Brindleface, to give the dogs a taste for cat blood.

"And with you being deputy, my clan would like to hear your first request!" Firestar meowed.

"Ok! Poppyfrost, I want you to lead a hunting patrol. Find some cats to go with you!" Brackenfur called to his daughter. He turned to Thornclaw. "Thornclaw, I want you to lead a border patrol. Check the ShadowClan border. Also, take some cats with you!" Brackenfur meowed.

Ashfur winced at the thought of Cinderheart having her kits. Yep, traitor blood. Mixed traitor blood. Her kits could try to be like Tigerstar. He turned his head around to see Leafpool talking to her sister, Squirrelflight.

"You can move to the nursery now," Leafpool meowed.

"Ok," Squirrelflight meowed.

Ashfur pictured his mate giving birth and then dying because of it. A strong pain gripped his stomach. Am I feeling it?

Chapter 4

"ThunderClan, attack!" Jaykit mewled. She leaped on her brother, Stonekit.

"Hey!" He squeaked. He kicked Jaykit back with his hind paws.

"Stonekit! You never want to play with me!" Jaykit meowed.

"I don't want to!" He complained.

"You have to play flight!" Her father's meow startled her. She spun around to see Ashfur and her mother, Cinderheart.

"Kits! Kits!" Cinderheart meowed. "Be nice!"

Jaykit clawed at her small moss nest. She ripped off a tiny part and rolled it into a ball. "How about we play moss ball?" Jaykit asked.

"No!" Stonekit meowed.

"What game do you want to play?" Jaykit asked.

"I don't want to play! I want to sleep!" Stonekit meowed.

Jaykit turned to see Dovekit playing with Ivykit in the corner.

"Can I play with you?" She meowed.

"Sure!" Dovekit replied.

Jaykit trotted over to them. *Why doesn't Stonekit won't to play with me?*

"So....What game do you wanna play?" Jaykit asked.

"Go get us some moss if you want to play moss-ball!" Ivykit meowed.

Jaykit frowned. She ran out of the den. *Why does it seem that every cat hates me?*

"Hello, Jaykit," Bumblepaw meowed. "What are you doing out of the nursery?"

"None of your business," Jaykit retorted.

"Don't disrespect someone older than you! I just asked a question!" Bumblepaw complained.

Jaykit's ear twitched. "You'll have to catch me first!" Jaykit hissed. She dived into a clump of ferns and darted through the camp entrance.

"Hey!" Bumblepaw yowled.

Jaykit ran through the forest. She raced though ferns and ducked under tree roots. She hopped over rocks and came to a halt. A huge tree stood in front of her. "Perfect!" She whispered. She unsheathed her tiny claws and scrambled up the tree. She groaned as she came back down. Jaykit pricked her ears. She heard paw-steps coming her way! Jaykit darted behind the tree and kept running. She halted at a stream. She smelled something yucky. "Gross," She hissed.

"Jaykit, where are you?!" Bumblepaw was calling.

Jaykit jumped. And with that, she fell into the stream. "Help...." Her yowl was drowned out by the noise of the water. She was carried downstream. "Oh no! I'm heading towards the river!" She hissed. "Help!" She yowled. She flailed her paws helplessly in the air. Jaykit bumped into a rock and went under. She gasped in terror as water filled her nose and ears. She touched the sandy bottom and was carried by the stream more. She swam upward and broke the surface. She gasped for air. The stream was getting wider. Jaykit looked farther ahead. She was heading towards the lake! Jaykit screamed in terror. She tried to push against the current. It was to strong and pushed her back and under. Jaykit rolled over onto her

back and was thrown against the current. She mewled helplessly. Then something pushed past her. Something soft. Like a pelt. Maybe a cat! She scrambled upward and broke the surface. A faded cat was swimming with her. It was silver. She had pretty tabby markings and pushed a small stick towards Jaykit.

"Hold on to this. You'll be fine," She meowed.

Jaykit swam forward and grabbed the stick. The current dragged her legs and tail helplessly on. "Who are you?" Jaykit gasped.

"I am Silverstream," The she cat replied. Then all of a sudden she pushed a twig bed towards Jaykit and faded away.

"Wait....Don't go," Jaykit rasped. She pulled the twig bed towards her and tied it on the stick with the strong grass strands. Reeds were carefully weaved into it. Jaykit collapsed onto it. The moon floated in the sky. *Oh StarClan, why did I run away*? Jaykit closed her eyes. "I have somewhere to sleep without drowning," She whispered. *Someone will find me*, she thought. She drifted helplessly into the lake now. If her little float sunk, she would drown for sure, not unless that cat called Silverstream had come back. "Hello? Any cat here? Silverstream? Any cat?" She called out. But it was hopeless. It was all just hopeless. But a clear voice rang in her ears. Don't worry little one, you'll be safe in time.

Jaykit awoke. The wind pushed her float towards the island. Then all of a sudden it pushed her float to strongly and it turned over and Jaykit went under. "Help!" She wailed. She clawed her way through the water but she sunk downward. "He-" She was cut off as water filled her mouth. The dirty black water choked her nostrils and mouth. Then she felt something under her. A cat was under her, pushing her up. "Silverstream?" She managed to choke out. She was lifted up and was back on her float. She shivered with cold. Her float was being pushed along.

"Oh StarClan! This kit is still alive!" The cat meowed.

Jaykit couldn't talk. The water had made her throat sore.

"Don't worry little one! You'll be safe once we get to the island

shore!" The cat encouraged.

"W-who....." Jaykit choked up water. "A.....are y.....ou?"

"I'm Mistyfoot!" The she cat replied.

Jaykit was almost knocked off her paws as her float hit the island shore.

"Oh, sorry! Great StarClan, how did a ThunderClan kit make it here? You almost drowned!" Mistyfoot meowed. She licked Jaykit's head. "But you were brave!"

"Ne.....need to go.....back," Jaykit whispered.

"Listen! You'll be staying in RiverClan camp for a while!" Mistyfoot meowed.

"W-why?" Jaykit managed to speak clearly.

"You are to young to make it back to ThunderClan!" Mistyfoot pointed out. "It would be a risk anyway to cross WindClan territory!"

"Thank you," Jaykit meowed.

Mistyfoot dipped her head. "Now I have to cross the tree bridge to get to our camp. Leopardstar will be waiting. She wanted me to hunt on the island. But as I was going back, I heard wailing and splashing and I looked back to see you. You were half-drowned. I'm surprised it was a kit!"

"I.....I just had no one to play with and I went out for a walk. Bumblepaw was looking for me and it got out of hand and I fell into the stream and I almost drowned. I meet a cat named Silverstream. She saved me and gave me this float," Jaykit stammered.

"Silverstream!" Mistyfoot gasped. "Crookedstar's daughter."

"Who is Crookedstar?" Jaykit asked.

"He was the leader before Leopardstar. Your Clan will be worried

about you. They'll be looking for you," Mistyfoot meowed.

"They sure will," Jaykit meowed. "My father, Ashfur, and my mother, Cinderheart, will be worried. Maybe even my brother, Stonekit," Jaykit meowed. She turned to Mistyfoot, who was stopped dead in her tracks. Fear flashed in her eyes. "What's wrong?" She asked.

"My brother was Stonefur. He was the RiverClan deputy before me. He was killed by Blackstar- Blackfoot then- who was ordered by Tigerstar," Mistyfoot explained. "These times are hard. Every cat is losing their brother or sister. Like Stormfur. He lost his sister," Mistyfoot meowed.

"I would die if I had to to protect my brother!" Jaykit challenged.

"I would never harm you," Mistyfoot meowed. "Or your brother."

As they neared camp, Mistyfoot hurried on. "Come on!" She called.

Jaykit hurried forward but tripped over a small tree root. She scrambled to her paws, hoping that any cat didn't see her. As she walked through the camp entrance with Mistyfoot, she felt every cat starring at her.

"Mistyfoot! What have you brought here? I expected fish! Not ThunderClan kits!" Leopardstar padded forward. She glared at them.

"I was out hunting on the island like you said. As I was leaving, I heard splashing and wailing. It was a good thing I was there or this kit would of been fish-food!" Mistyfoot meowed. Her whiskers twitched.

"So, ThunderClan is teaching their kits how to swim I see?" Leopardstar meowed.

"But the poor kit fell in by-"

"I fell in by accident!" Jaykit cut Mistyfoot off. "I went out to take a walk and no cat knew! I accidently fell in the stream! Then some cat named Silverstream helped me by giving me a float!" Jaykit explained.

Shocked gasps echoed around her.

"Silverstream?"

"Silverstream helped you?"

"Silence!" Leopardstar yowled. "You can stay in our clan. But... you might have to wait before you go. It's to risky and dangerous to bring you back through WindClan territory!" Leopardstar meowed. "I'm surprised you didn't drown for a kit as small as you!"

Jaykit grumbled. Mistyfoot looked at her.

"Mothwing! Willowshine!" Leopardstar called. "Give some help to this half-drowned kit!" Leopardstar meowed as they ran across the clearing.

Jaykit's scruff was held by a dappled golden she cat. "It's ok. Everything will be ok," She reassured.

Chapter 5

"I want a patrol to look out for Jaykit! Bumblepaw said that he last saw her at the Sky Oak!" Firestar called. "Brackenfur! Get a patrol organized!" Firestar yowled.

Brackenfur is to weak to be deputy. I'll have to kill him. Ashfur waved his tail in anger.

"Ashfur! Oh i'm so worried about our daughter! She could have drowned! Or maybe WindClan is holding her hostage!" Cinderheart complained.

"Well! Why don't you go find her? Jaykit is six moons old now! She's as old as an apprentice!" Ashfur snapped.

"Stonekit can't be a 'paw without his sister around!" Cinderheart meowed.

"If you're so worried, go look for Jaykit yourself!" Ashfur snapped. He wasn't go to put up with his useless mate. He watched as Cinderheart padded off to Brackenfur. Ashfur rose to his paws and padded over to the deputy as well.

"Ashfur," Brackenfur meowed. "I'll have you to join my patrol with Honeyfern and Poppyfrost."

Ashfur moved through the undergrowth. He had his nose to the ground to try and sniff out Jaykit's scent. *Let her die*, he thought. He then smelled fox and pricked his ears.

"Fox!" He heard Honeyfern yowl.

Ashfur burst out of the ferns. Poppyfrost attacked he fox. It had Brackenfur clamped in its jaws. He was screaming in terror. "Honeyfern! Go back to camp and get more warriors in case another fox shows up!" Ashfur called.

Honeyfern stopped attacking the fox and darted through the ferns. Honeyfern was quick on her paws.

Ashfur watched as Brackenfur was thrown in the air. The deputy landed with a hard thud and blood leaked from under him.

"Brackenfur!" Poppyfrost ran over to her father. She crouched over the dead deputy. She hadn't noticed that the fox was right behind her.

"Look out!" Ashfur screamed. But it was to late. The fox grabbed her by the neck and slammed her body down into Brackenfur's limp body. Ashfur shuddered. The fox grabbed her puffy tail and ripped it clean off. Ashfur darted and slashed the fox with his long claws. The fox screamed as it saw another patrol of cats darted towards it. Honeyfern had come back. Hazeltail and Berrynose pelted after the fox. Sorreltail crouched over her mate's dead body.

"No!" She cried. Poppyfrost lay beside him. She was still alive. Now the Clan would need a new deputy.

Poppyfrost trotted back to camp. Her tail was only a stump just like Berrynose. "Now i'm not the only one!" He had been taunting her. She dropped her prey in the fresh-kill pile.

"All cats old enough to hunt join beneath the high rock for a clan meeting!" Firestar called.

Poppyfrost trotted over. It had been two days since her father's death. Firestar hadn't appointed a new deputy yet.

"As you know, we lost our deputy to a fox! I shall now appoint a new deputy before the body of Brackenfur so that his spirit may hear and approve my choice! Ashfur will be the new deputy of ThunderClan!" Firestar called.

"Ashfur! Ashfur! Ashfur!" The clan cheered.

Poppyfrost didn't join in. *What about Graystripe?* She thought.

"But I have one more announcement! Poppyfrost will be joining the elders!" Firestar called. "Due to her tail, she can't balance properly," Firestar explained.

"But Berrynose!" Cats hissed.

"Berrynose has more of his tail!" Firestar explained. "Poppyfrost, are you ready to leave your warrior duties to become an elder?" He asked.

"Sure," Poppyfrost called. She looked at Sorreltail. The poor she cat looked shaken. "Its ok," Sorreltail reassured her.

Poppyfrost dragged herself to the elders den. Mousefur, Longtail, and Purdy greeted her.

"Welcome!" The elders mewed.

"I want to be doing my warrior training!" Poppyfrost complained. "This is terrible!"

"You got half yer' tail missin'!" Purdy meowed.

"Yeah! And Berrynose is still a warrior!" Poppyfrost hissed.

"You'd fall off a tree if you were on it!" Mousefur grumbled.

"And hedgehogs might fly," Poppyfrost muttered.

"You'll get used to it eventually," Longtail meowed.

"Used to what?" Poppyfrost growled.

"Being an elder!" Longtail replied.

"Yeah I guess you're right," Poppyfrost meowed. *No, I'll never get used to this*, Poppyfrost thought.

"Here, eat this!" Mothwing meowed.

"But.... I don't like fish!" Jaykit complained.

"You'll have to eat it! Do you want to starve?" Mothwing hissed.

"Fine!" Jaykit retorted. She took a small bite of the fish and gulped it down. It wasn't that bad. But it wasn't as good as mice.

"Willowshine! I need some thyme leaves!" Mothwing meowed.

"Ok," Willowshine meowed. She came back with some green leaves that smelled yucky.

"Ewwww!" Jaykit hissed.

Willowshine sighed. "Eat them! They're thyme leaves!" She meowed.

Jaykit stuck out her tongue.

"We ight as well teach you how to swim," She meowed.

"No!" Jaykit meowed. She saw her pushing the gross leaves towards her. "Fine!" Jaykit hissed.

"You have an attitude, young one," Mothwing chuckled.

Jaykit almost gagged as she swallowed the leaves.

Mothwing's whiskers twitched with amusement.

Jaykit's pelt prickled with irritation. Her paws were itching to be in the lake again. She was going to teach herself how to swim.

"Oh! By the way, I don't think I was told your name," Mothwing meowed.

"It's Jaykit," Jaykit meowed. "I need to make my dirt."

Mothwing nodded.

Jaykit scrambled through the dirt-place tunnel. It smelled. She scrambled through the exit. Finally! She was on RiverClan land. She could finally get away. She was gonna have to collect sticks.

Dawn had passed when Jaykit had finally collected enough sticks. She weaved reeds and strong strands of grass into a circle that was as big as a badger's paw. She created two layers. She packed them together with sticky honey. Jaykit circled the sticks around it. She weaved them into the circle by tying the grass strands around the sticks. She created a float. She wasn't sure if it would hold her or float at all. Jaykit padded to the shallows. She stepped in. The cold water felt like vines wrapping around her feet. It felt like the water was trying to call her name. Jaykit jumped in the water. It was up to her belly now. She felt like she could swim. She began padding in the water. Her head went under but she forced it up. Her tail stranded behind her. Her legs and hind legs padded into the lake. She was still a kit, but she was gonna train herself how to swim. Then she realized that she had gone to far out. "Oh no," She meowed. She turned around but then her heart stopped as she heard a hawk from up above. She had to get away fast! Jaykit's heart was pounding. She swam on. Her legs were weakening. Then she felt relief wash over her as her paws touched the sandy bottom. She padded slowly to her raft. She picked it up and dragged it over to a tree. She gently placed it under the root so it wouldn't wash away. A day's work! She padded on back to camp.

Ashfur had to kill Firestar. He had to do it. And he had to do it with a fox trap. Ashfur didn't care is his daughter was alive or not. Firestar had ordered his patrols to look down by the stream. He even went over to ShadowClan and WindClan to speak. So Jaykit was gone. But, Firestar never checked RiverClan. He said that Jaykit could never make it over there. Ashfur stumbled through the undergrowth. He laid his eyes on a fox trap. Perfect! Ashfur ran back to camp.

"Firestar, I need to speak to you," Ashfur meowed.

Firestar flicked his tail. "Ok."

"I found something," Ashfur meowed. "And as your deputy, I am asking you to only come with me to see it. No other cat can,"

Ashfur meowed.

"Alright. What is this 'something'?" Firestar asked.

"I'm not sure. You'll see when we get there," Ashfur meowed.

"Alright," Firestar meowed.

It had been two moons since Ashfur became deputy.

"There it is," Ashfur meowed. He pointed with his tail to the fox trap.

"Really, Ashfur? That's a fox trap! We have known these for moons now!" Firestar hissed. Fear glittered in his eyes.

"I know," Ashfur meowed. His voice grew cold. "I am killing you with it."

"Really?" Firestar hissed.

Ashfur leaped on him and put his paw on Firestar's head. He pushed his head through the fox trap and then it snapped tight around his neck. "Oops!" He hissed.

Firestar breathed hard. Blood welled from the tightness.
"You....you're crazy!" Firestar spat.

"And you know what else is crazy? I killed all these cats!" Ashfur meowed.

Firestar's eyes widened. His ears flattened against his head.
"Cloudtail? Hollyleaf? Lionblaze? Jayfeather? Dustpelt? Sandstorm? Brambleclaw?" Firestar asked.

"Yep! All of them!" Ashfur hissed.

"Even Brackenfur?" Firestar meowed.

"No! But I watched him die!" Ashfur purred.

"You....you are just like Tigerstar..." Firestar meowed.

"Tigerstar told me that if I kill all of your kin, he would give me something!" Ashfur meowed.

"And you'd believe him? Even a mouse with no brain wouldn't trust him!" Firestar hissed.

"You're a fool Firestar," Ashfur meowed.

Firestar gasped.

Ashfur tightened the lace around Firestar's neck. His breathing was cut off as he went limp. Ashfur smiled. He still had more of Firestar's kin to kill. Leafpool.

Chapter 6

Jaykit soared on the lake.

"Nice!" Mistyfoot called.

Jaykit swam towards her float.

"Do you have RiverClan blood in you? You can swim really well!" Mistyfoot called.

"No! I'm training myself to swim!" Jaykit replied.

"You were born to swim!" Mistyfoot meowed.

Jaykit pricked her ears. "Did you hear that?" She asked.

"Hear what?" Mistyfoot called.

"Look out!" Jaykit meowed. A WindClan warrior leaped from the bushes. A brown tom next to him.

"Barkface! Kestrelpaw!" Mistyfoot greeted.

"Is that a kit, swimming in the water?" Barkface meowed.

"This kit is training herself how to swim! She's ThunderClan!" Mistyfoot explained. She had to explain to them how Jaykit got over here.

"We need to talk to Mothwing and Willowshine!" Barkface meowed.

"Ok, I'll take you there," Mistyfoot meowed. Turning to Jaykit, she added, "Stay there."

Jaykit didn't listen. She wanted to get home. To her Clan. A thought struck her. She was gonna float out to the lake! Jaykit put her paw in the water and swam forward in her float.

Jaykit blinked open her eyes. She had fallen asleep! She looked around. Everything was white. It was foggy. The air was hot and humid, promising rain. Jaykit looked around. She was still on her float. She was hungry. She carefully put her paw in the water and swam forward slowly. She had been here for some time. StarClan knows how long. "Hello? Any cat here?" She called. She was in the middle of the lake! No wind would push her float easily. She looked around. Nothing. She dipped her paw back in the water. Then rain poured down from the sky. "Great," She muttered. *Mistyfoot is probably looking for me*. Jaykit ignored the rain. Her heart stopped. Her float was coming apart! Jaykit scrambled to the side that had the most half left. The other half floated away. Now the wind was picking up. The fog was starting to clear. It began to rain harder. Jaykit's pelt was drenched. She looked up. A full moon floated in the sky. The time of the Gathering! If she stayed home, she would be an apprentice and she would be going to the Gathering. She unsheathed her tiny claws. She lay down and curled up in her nest. Sleep drifted over her.

Jaykit awoke when her float shook. She sat up, looked around, and felt her blood run cold. A murky brown wave was heading towards her. Jaykit screamed in terror. It was coming in, fast! Jaykit scrambled down and began paddling in the water. Her float would be useless. It was all useless. She was going to drown! The shadow of the wave loomed over her and crashed down onto Jaykit. She screamed as the water washed into her lungs. She scrambled upward but a piece of driftwood hit her heard and knocked her back under. Her lungs were screaming for air. Jaykit could only hear the water crashing in her ears. But she wasn't a kit anymore. She was eight moons old now. She was an apprentice. Jaykit scrambled up and broke the surface. She gasped for air. Her paws were paddling in the water. She looked around. Her float was

nowhere to be seen! Where was it? *The wave must have shredded it*, she thought. Waves crashed angrly around her. They knocked her under but she swam back up. Then she spotted something that she could hold on to. A piece of driftwood. She swam forward. Jaykit planted herself onto the peice of driftwood. She panted and took deep breaths. Jaykit shivered. Maybe she should drown. It was all hopeless. Jaykit gasped in terror as another wave crashed towards her. It crashed onto her. The breath was knocked out of her. She went under the water, deeper into the darkness. Her vision clouded. She closed her eyes. *Everything will be ok!*

Jaykit snapped her eyes open as she heard thunder crash above the water. She swam upward and broke the surface. Jaykit gasped for air. The water drained out of her lungs. Then she hit something. Something. Sand! She neared land. It wasn't ThunderClan. Jaykit carried herself forward with her forepaws; her back legs trailing helplessly behind. Jaykit pulled herself to the shore. She lay down, her head on her paws. The waves lapped steadily at her back legs and tail. Jaykit shook the water from her pelt, only for it to get soaked again by the hard rain. She'd have to find shelter. She rose to her paws and stumbled over to a rabbit hole. She hurried into it and curled up, sleep and tiredness drifting over her.

Jaykit awoke. She heard voices.

"I smell ThunderClan scent over here!" A tom hissed.

Jaykit peeped out. A black and white tom was standing in the clearing. A dark brown tom stood beside him. A dark ginger she cat stood beside a tortiseshell she cat.

"Look! Is that a squirrel?" The brown tom asked.

"No, mouse-brain! That's a mouse! Lets get it!" The tortiseshell snapped.

"Hey! I'm no mouse!" Jaykit mewled.

"Oh StarClan!" The dark ginger cat meowed. "A ThunderClan kit!"

"She's soaked!" The black and white tom meowed.

"Yeah! I am soaked! I almost drowned in the lake!" Jaykit hissed.

"What were you doing in the lake with weather like this?" The dark ginger she cat hissed.

"Who are you?" Jaykit asked, ignoring their question.

"I am Russetfur," She meowed.

"Russetfur! Don't give kits information!" The black and white tom hissed.

"Crowfrost, I'm the deputy!" Russetfur snapped.

Jaykit backed away and stumbled down into a tunnel.

"Hey! She's gone!" They yowled.

Jaykit ran as far as her paws could carry her. Her belly grumbled with hunger. It was so dark in the tunnels that she just ran every which way. She bumped into a stone wall. She fell on her back. She had to restore her energy. She had to sleep. Jaykit curled up. She closed her eyes. The darkness drifted over her in a flash.

Jaykit blinked open her eyes. She rose to her paws and stretched. "I'm going to find a way out of here!" She screamed. Her voice bounced off the walls of the tunnels. Jaykit ran through passages. The darkness seemed to engulf her. It carried Jaykit off her paws, leading her to the right direction. Jaykit stopped to sniff the air. Her fluffy tail brushed the ground. She ran through a long tunnel and, stopping, she ran left. She turned to the right. She entered a cave. Now, moonlight glittered in the cave. A hole was at the top. Raindrops battered at the cave floor slowly. She could see better now. Jaykit ran ahead. Her blood ran cold as she ran into another tunnel. She trotted on now. The tunnel was narrow, getting thinner as she went on. Jaykit could see light at the end of the tunnel! She tried to run, but the tunnel walls were so tight around her. She pushed through and ran towards the light. Her pelt brushed against the walls. The rocky walls felt like cats' pelt. Whispers and moans echoed through the cave. Jaykit got creeped out. She ran faster, pushing past the tunnels. At last, she was in the forest. The trees

blew in the wind and shadows and mice scent were all around her. She was on ThunderClan ground at last. Jaykit darted through ferns and hopped over tree roots, pelting towards the camp.

Chapter 7

Ashfur returned back to camp. He dragged Firestar from behind.

"Firestar!"

"Firestar!"

"What in the name of StarClan happened?"

"We were attacked by foxes!" Ashfur lied.

"What!?"

"Firestar!" Leafpool yowled. She threw herself at her father.

Squirrelflight joined in. "Firestar....?"

"We were attacked by foxes!" Ashfur repeated.

"I am back!!" A voice yowled. Jaykit stumbled into the clearing. "What happened??!!"

"We were attacked by foxes!" Ashfur hissed.

"Jaykit!" Cinderheart meowed. Stonekit ran over.

"Where did you go? You're soaked!" Stonekit complained.

"Calm down!" Ashfur hissed. "I have to go to the moonpool. I will go by myself," He announced.

"Aren't you going to welcome your daughter?" Cinderheart asked.

"I will when I come back. And we'll sit vigil when I come back!" Ashfur replied.

"Don't you need to send a patrol to look for the foxes?" A cat yowled.

Ashfur saw Thornclaw. "I will when I get back!" He hissed.

Sorreltail crouched in the clearing.

Ashfur ran through the camp entrance.

Jaykit blinked open her eyes. She was going to be an apprentice once Ashfur came back. Her father was gonna be a leader! Her mother would be proud. But her life was long and hard. She told the Clan about her journey. Cinderheart and Stonekit were amazed.

"Jaykit!" Cinderheart called.

"What?" Jaykit called.

"You have to clean the elders' den!" She replied.

"Ok!" Jaykit mewed. She rose to her paws and stretched. Jaykit parted her jaws in a yawn. She raced to the medicine cat den. Leafpool was there. Brightheart was with her apprentice, Alderpaw.

"Hi, Jaykit! Need anything?" Leafpool greeted.

"I need fresh moss for the elders!" Jaykit meowed.

"It's in the back of the den!" Leafpool replied.

Jaykit trotted to the back and grabbed some moss with her jaws. She raced out of the den and hurried to the elders.

"Hello, Jaykit," Poppyfrost meowed.

"Poppyfrost! What happened to your tail?" Jaykit asked

Poppyfrost hesitated and her whiskers twitched. "I was attacked by a fox. The thing bit my tail clean off!" She meowed. "And it killed my father."

"Brackenfur?" Jaykit meowed.

"Yes," Poppyfrost meowed.

"Here. Give us our bedding and we'll fix it. Go get us some fresh-kill and then you can go to sleep," Longtail meowed.

"Ok," Jaykit meowed. She couldn't believe that Poppyfrost had joined the elders. She raced over to the fresh-kill pile. She took a mole, a sparrow, and a mouse. Jaykit dragged them along to the elders.

"Thank you!" Poppyfrost meowed.

Jaykit trotted out of the den and ran into Stonekit.

"Jaykit," He meowed.

"What?" Jaykit asked.

"Can you get Leafpool for me? I don't feel good," Her brother meowed.

"Sure!" Jaykit meowed. She started to walk over to the medicine cat den. "Leafpool! Stonekit needs you. He doesn't feel good," Jaykit meowed.

"Stonekit? Ok," Leafpool meowed.

Jaykit raced over to the nursery. She flopped down and her side and curled up to sleep.

Jaykit raced through tunnels. She was in the tunnels again! How did she get here? Jaykit could hear the sound of water. She felt her way through the darkness. Then her paws touched thin air. Jaykit yowled as she realized she was falling through the darkness. She

crashed into water. Her legs were stiff and numb. Jaykit was sinking to the bottom. She sprang upward and swam. Her lungs were screaming for air. Jaykit finally broke the surface. The tunnels were flooding. Jaykit realized that she was in the cave! The hole at the surface was out of reach. Jaykit would have to wait for the water to grow higher. Her paws splashed water everywhere. Jaykit spotted a rock on the side. She could hold onto it. She fiercely swam over to it. Jaykit held on with her paws, trembling. She took deep breaths. The water was rising fast. She looked up at the hole in the roof of the cave. It was just pitch black. Were there more tunnels up there. Jaykit waited for the water to rise higher. It finally engulfed around her legs. Jaykit climbed on the rock and stood. She shook her pelt and water drops flew everywhere. She watched as the water swept higher.

Jaykit sprang out of the water and through the hole. She climbed upward and popped out.

"Welcome, you are Ashfur's kin," A voice meowed.

Jaykit turned to see a gray tom. He had spiky gray fur patched with white. His eyes were black with thin amber slits. "Who are you? Where am I?" Jaykit asked. Her pelt prickled with irritation.

"I am Thistleclaw. This is the Dark Forest," He replied. His eyes swept over the Jaykit.

"Well, why am I here?" Jaykit hissed. She unsheathed her claws and sank them into the lush grass. She realized that she could smell blood. She felt it under her paws, staining them with red. Jaykit hissed. She took q better look at Thistleclaw. His throat was soaked with blood, spilling every now and then.

"You are Ashfur's kin!" Thistleclaw meowed. His tail lashed and his voice grew cold. "You are to kind to do the things that Ashfur has done. Wait- Ashstar now," Thistleclaw meowed.

"My father is leader already?" Jaykit asked.

Thistleclaw groaned as blood dripped from his throat. He opened his mouth to speak but he coughed up blood and watched as it

spattered the gray grass.

"You are bleeding!" Jaykit meowed. She longed to run over to him, but she held her ground.

"I know! I'm not blind!" Thistleclaw hissed. His gaze was hostile.

"My paws are covered in your blood!" Jaykit complained.

"You know, Jaykit, you aren't a kit anymore!" Thistleclaw spat.

"I may be older than a kit but at heart I still am!" Jaykit snapped.

Thistleclaw bristled but held his ground. "I have only com here to train you!" He meowed.

"I don't need training!" Jaykit hissed.

Thistleclaw leaped at her and slashed her throat.

Jaykit winced as blood drained from her. She dropped to her paws and her vision clouded.

Jaykit snapped her eyes open. She was in the nursery. Jaykit sighed. What had *Thistleclaw* wanted with her? Her pelt prickled with irritation. Her paws itched to find out more answers.

"Jaykit! Jaykit! Ashstar has returned!" Her mother was yowling.

"Cinderheart! You're wailing like the forest is on fire!" Daisy grumbled.

"Sorry!" Cinderheart meowed. She looked at Jaykit. "Come and greet Ashstar!"

Jaykit rose to her paws. Her throat burned like it was on fire. She seemed mouse-brained when she asked this question. "Is my throat bleeding?"

"No. You're fine!" Cinderheart meowed. She nudged Jaykit to her paws. "Come on! It's about time you were apprenticed!" She purred.

Jaykit stumbled over to her father.

"Jaykit. I was about to call a Clan meeting. You are being rude!" Ashstar hissed.

Jaykit growled. *I come over here to greet you and you don't give a mouse-tail about me!* Jaykit fought back the urge to scream the words at her father's face. That was the last thing on her mind. "Sorry."

"Sorry doesn't cut it," Her father hissed. "You'll be taking care of the elders for sure!" He hissed. Then his eyes flashed as though he had an idea.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the high rock for a clan meeting!" Ashstar yowled.

Chapter 8

"Stonepaw, you will be mentored by Thornclaw," Ashstar meowed.

Jaykit's brother touched noses with his mentor.

Ashstar turned to look down at Millie. "Jaypaw-" He didn't look at her, "You will be mentored by Millie," He meowed. He blinked slowly as they touched noses.

"Well! What about the deputy? Will we have one?" Hazeltail yowled.

Jaypaw's pelt prickled with irritation. Ashstar would show weakness if he didn't appoint a deputy.

Every cat was eyeing Graystripe.

"The deputy shall be Thornclaw," Ashstar sighed.

"Thornclaw! Thornclaw! Thornclaw!" The clan yowled.

"Now! I need a hunting patrol!" Ashstar called. He looked at Thornclaw and Stonepaw. "Thornclaw, organize some patrols!" He meowed. He turned to look at Millie. "Millie, take out your apprentice."

"Yes, Ashstar," Millie dipped her head.

"What will we do first?" Jaypaw asked her mentor. "Hunting? Fighting?" Jaypaw sounded excited. Her voice then sounded boring. "Exploring?"

"You'll see once we get out," Millie told her.

Millie crouched down. The mouse still didn't see her. "So, watch me carefully," She whispered.

Jaypaw narrowed her eyes, making every move burn into her mind.

Then Millie sprang and the mouse ran towards Jaypaw. It was so frightened that it didn't notice her. Jaypaw awkwardly slammed her paws down on the mouse and hooked it in her claws, killing it.

"Nice!" Millie meowed. "We don't always use teamwork, but I guess this was the right time!" She meowed.

Jaypaw looked at her mouse. Her first kill! She wondered if Stonepaw was hunting.

"Now, bury your prey and lets go," Millie meowed.

Jaypaw buried her prey and followed her mentor. They were in a silent clearing that was surrounded by fat, tall trees.

"I will teach you two battle moves. Just in case we run into an enemy or a fox," Millie meowed.

Jaypaw listened and watched Millie carefully. It was boring, but she was excited.

Dawn had come by the time they started to head back. Jaypaw had learned how to hunt and how to fight- well, she only learned two moves.

Jaypaw and Millie entered camp. Millie sat down her mouse in the fresh-kill pile. "You can rest if you want," She meowed.

Jaypaw watched as she padded away.

"Jaypaw!" Stonepaw's voice called her.

Jaypaw darted to her brother. He was crouched over a brown lump of fur. It was smaller than him, but barely. Jaypaw realized that it was a rabbit.

"Look! I caught a rabbit!" He meowed. He breathed deeply and Jaypaw almost thought she heard his heart thumping.

"Cool! But....what's so important about it?" Jaypaw asked, irritated. Her paws itched to know. She thought he was hiding something. A secret.

Stonepaw leaned on her shoulder, his voice barely a whisper. "I hunted it on WindClan territory. So, it's the good kind!"

Jaypaw shot her brother a look that was mixed with anger and worry. "Stonepaw!" She lightly cuffed him over the ear. "Don't do that! That's against the warrior code!" She hissed.

"I- I didn't know!" Stonepaw meowed. "Ash-Ashstar told me to hunt there!" He complained.

Jaypaw gasped. Her eyes widened. Her father must not have respected anything. Ashstar, her own father, didn't love her or care for her. He always snapped at her.

"J-Jaypaw?" Stonepaw meowed.

Jaypaw leaned on her brother's shoulder. "Ashstar doesn't like me!" She hissed.

"Same!" Stonepaw growled. His eyes narrowed. "What was the point of him having Cinderheart as a mate when he had kits that he never cared about!" Stonepaw slid out his claws. He flattened his ears. "I'll show him!"

"Calm down. Maybe we have to prove to him?" Jaypaw meowed.

"We can't prove ourselves!" Stonepaw meowed. A growl was rising in his throat. "Remember what happened to Swiftpaw and Brightheart?" He asked. "Swiftpaw died and Brightheart lost half her face! And, Cloudtail is her mate. But, Cloudtail is dead. Brightheart couldn't live with that. She became a medicine cat."

Jaypaw's heart had skipped a beat. Her mind clouded with the viscous dogs who tore the cats apart. She closed her eyes and slid out her claws and pricked her ears. The sound of cats shrieking and

dogs howling with triumph filled the hollow. She snapped her eyes open and everything was gone. The peaceful noise of camp roared in her ears. "I've never seen a dog, but I don't want to meet one!" Jaypaw meowed. Her tail fluffed out and her neck fur was bristling.

"I have!" Stonepaw meowed. "Just today!"

Jaypaw gasped. "What? You never told me! Tell me, what happened?" She meowed. Jaypaw curled her tail neatly over her paws.

"Well, I-I was just...." His voice trailed off and it grew cold. "....Alone," He meowed. His eyes narrowed.

Jaypaw felt hurt. "Go on," She gently nudged her brother's shoulder with her nose.

Stonepaw swallowed his fear. "I heard barking," He meowed, his voice full of confidence. "I turned my head just in time to see the dog. The loud creature was just a fox-length away from me," Stonepaw meowed. His tail swept the ground. "I started running, since I didn't know any fighting moves. I was running and came across the thunderpath," His eyes widened. "I-I didn't know what to do! It was a death or death choice! I would get torn apart by the dog or I would get hit by a monster on the thunderpath," Stonepaw twitched and pricked his ears. "Thornclaw wasn't there."

"Go on," Jaypaw meowed.

"But StarClan was on my side. Most of the monsters cleared so I bounded across the thunderpath. When I was safe on the other side, I turned and watched as the dog was hit and killed by a monster. It was mouse-brained to go on the thunderpath when that monster came!" Stonepaw hissed. He almost seemed glad he had escaped without becoming dog-food. "I thought I was crow-food for sure!"

"Well, it was your time to join StarClan," A voice behind them startled Jaypaw. She turned to see their father, Ashstar, padding up to them.

"H-How could you say that? You've no respect for us or you mate!" Jaypaw growled. Part of her wanted to lunge at Ashstar, but he was her father.

Ashstar slid out his claws. "Why don't you go away for some time?" He suggested. His ears flattened against his head and he hissed. He bared his lips in a snarl to reveal sharp, pointed fangs. "You've never seen the old forest. You've never heard of what the old forest was like. Why don't you go there and become kittypets so that I don't have to deal with you," Ashstar's voice was cold.

"Yeah! That's right! We could go there, become kittypets, and your clan would betray you for letting down your kits and mate!" Jaypaw growled. She felt a growl rising in her throat. "How about you become a kittypet yourself," Jaypaw was startled and almost regretted it as soon as the words were out.

Ashstar bristled. "How rude. Has any cat taught you manners? Cause I don't think so," He taunted.

"Has any cat taught *you* manners?" Jaypaw retorted.

Ashstar bristled and slid out his claws. "Go on," He hissed. "We can fight!"

Jaypaw's heart dropped. Fight her father? No way! He was a leader with 9 lives! He would kill her in an instant. "I don't-" She was cut off as Ashstar sprang on her. She felt long, sharp claws rake her shoulder. No. Jaypaw couldn't let her Clan leader beat her. But she only learned 2 moves. That's it! Jaypaw would copy everything her father did.

"You're standing there like a startled rabbit!" Her father growled. "Fight me!" He hissed.

Jaypaw, tired of his taunts, launched at him. She raked his ears with her claws, but he ducked and she hit thin air.

"To slow!" Ashstar growled.

Jaypaw felt his paw go under her. He whipped his paws over her legs and Jaypaw fell to the ground. Ashstar leaped on top of her

and bit her ear. Jaypaw growled. She turned around and lunged at Ashstar. She was able to grip his chin with her paws. Jaypaw slid out her claws and raked them across his muzzle. Fresh, hot blood spattered her paw. Jaypaw ignored it.

"Huh, you think a simple scratch on my nose can kill me? You've thought wrong," Her father growled. He crouched, ready to spring.

Jaypaw twitched and braced herself. Her tail lashed from side to side.

"Stop!" A voice yowled.

Cinderheart, her mother, bounded in front of them. "Please!"

"Out of my way!" Ashstar hissed. He swung his claws and tried to rake them across her throat, but Cinderheart's sister, Honeyfern, darted in and was struck by the blow.

Honeyfern wailed in agony as blood spilled from her. Her mouth hung open and she moaned in pain. She was trying to say something. Blood poured from her throat. Honeyfern then fell to the ground.

Just when Jaypaw thought it was over, Honeyfern wailed loudly and thrashed her limbs around. Jaypaw wanted to close her ears. She wanted to curl up and go to sleep. But, no. She was frozen to the spot. Her body was stiff with fear. Her neck fur bristled with rage. Then Honeyfern's shriek of terror was cut off as her body fell limp.

Cinderheart bristled. She starred down at her sister's dead body. "No! I lost my father! I can't lose you!" She brushed her flank with her tail, ignoring the thought that it was soaked in blood. Cinderheart crouched over her sister. "Please! Wake up!"

Jaypaw could smell the anger and pain and sorrow coming off her in waves.

Cinderheart stood up, eyes blazing. She starred down at Ashstar. "You were my mate," She began. "Now, you mean nothing to me," She hissed. Her ears were flattened. "I could care less if you died."

"You mean nothing to me as well," Ashstar meowed. Shocked gasps came from the hollow. No cat, just no cat, had ever abandoned their mate like that. But Jaypaw could agree with Cinderheart. "You can tell that to the whole of the forest."

"I could warn every Clan that there is a killer on the loose," Cinderheart meowed.

"Enough of this!" Ashstar hissed. His muzzle was stained with blood. "We shall appoint new rules."

Jaypaw's heart sank. *We? What did we mean?* Jaypaw starred at her brother.

He was giving her the *what should we do* look.

Jaypaw took her eyes off her brother. Her father had gone insane. Killing a cat just like that, in front of the whole Clan. Jaypaw could tell that some cats felt unsafe.

"I will get rid of the medicine cats! We shall kill them!" Ashstar yowled.

Yowls of protest rang through the hollow. Even one cat rose its voice. "Why should we trust you! You're full of lies!"

Jaypaw could almost agree with the cat.

"And," Ashstar began. "If any apprentice wants to become a warrior, they must go to the old forest and come back, alive," He meowed.

This time, no cat protested.

Jaypaw stood up and let her voice be loud and clear. "I'll make the journey! Stonepaw will come with me!" She meowed. She noticed that cats were starring at her. *Oh know*, she thought, *did I do something wrong?*

Stonepaw rose to his paws. "I'll go!" He meowed.

Bumblepaw, Foxpaw, and Icepaw rose to their paws. "We'll go!" They shouted.

Chapter 9

Jaypaw padded through the dense forest, Stonepaw at her side.

"How long will it take?" Stonepaw growled.

Bumblepaw lashed his tail. "Ok. I suddenly regret going with you all," He meowed. He faced the strong wind.

Jaypaw could tell rain was coming. Night was falling. The moon floated high in the night sky and the tall trees cast shadows over the forest. "I think we're lost," She meowed.

"WHAT?" Bumblepaw hissed. It was freezing cold, it was night, they were lost, and it would rain soon.

"Hey! It's snowing!" Icepaw meowed. She danced in circles as snow began to fall lightly.

"Leaf-bare," Jaypaw muttered. She looked at Bumblepaw.

"We've got to hunt or we'll starve to death!" He growled.

Stonepaw parted his jaws to sniff the air. "First, we've got to find shelter. We'll freeze to death," He meowed.

"Well, i'm hunting!" Bumblepaw growled. He turned and stalked off. It began to snow harder.

"You'll get lost!" Jaypaw called. It was dark in these woods. The only thing she could see was white. The little white flakes of snow. "Blizzard!" She meowed.

"We've got to find shelter!" Stonepaw meowed.

"There!" Icepaw meowed. She pointed with her tail tip to a twisted tree. Underneath it was plenty space. The ground was dry and the tree had holes in it. "Great!"

"Should we sleep inside it? Or... under it?" Jaypaw meowed.

"It's best if we go inside," Foxpaw meowed.

Jaypaw dipped her head in agreement. Bumblepaw could get lost. They would find him alive. Or dead. Jaypaw darted towards the tree. She pushed through the hole. It was warm inside the tree.

"I'm hungry!" Icepaw meowed.

"We shall eat once-" Jaypaw was cut off as the ground beneath her paws tumbled. The log was rolling!

Icepaw squealed in terror. "Jaypaw!" She wailed.

Jaypaw felt splinters of wood fly in the air. The log tossed her around as it rolled over and over and over. Her heart almost stopped. She unsheathed her claws and planted them into the wood so she could hold on. Then she heard a thud noise and she flew through the air. One of Jaypaw's claws snapped. She winced in pain as blood dripped from her paw. The log split in half and Jaypaw was thrown out. She screamed as she plunged onto the frozen river. Her paws were stiff with cold. She wailed as the ice broke beneath her weight and she sunk in the frozen water. Jaypaw snapped open her eyes and prayed to StarClan that she wouldn't drown. Cold water drowned her lungs. Jaypaw was swept by the current and headed farther down the frozen river. She hit the banks and small rocks. Jaypaw saw blood stain the water, its redness against light blue. Jaypaw growled as a dead fish slapped into her face. She was growing dizzy. Jaypaw's eyes clouded. She needed air. Jaypaw sprung upward and burst through the ice. She slipped on the ice

and scrambled to the bank.

"Help!" She wailed. No response. "Please! Please. Someone. Anyone..." Jaypaw's voice trailed off. She could only hear the breeze blowing hard with the snow. Everything was white with snow. Jaypaw was freezing cold. Her blood was frozen to the core. She pulled herself closer to a tree. It had a small hollow in it, small enough for her to squeeze through. She pushed herself inside. Jaypaw curled up, her soaked tail brushing her nose. "Please," Jaypaw whispered. She blinked and closed her eyes, her pelt soaking everything around her. After heartbeats, sleep finally took over her.

Jaypaw snapped open her eyes. Thistleclaw and a tortoise shell she-cat stood over her, their shadows bathing the hollow. "What do you want?" Jaypaw grumbled.

"Hello," The she cat meowed.

Jaypaw blinked. "What in the name of StarClan!? Who are you?" Jaypaw asked. Her claws were unsheathed.

"I am Mapleshade. I have trained many cats. Crookedstar, Tigerstar..." Mapleshade's words were drowned out by Jaypaw's thoughts. *Tigerstar!* The evil cat who had to much power. Tigerstar killed Redtail. He even killed many other cats. And another evil cat that ruled ShadowClan.... Brokenstar. Jaypaw remembered Yellowfang's words about Brokenstar: *He could make you believe a mouse was a rabbit if he said so*.

"Jaypaw!" A voice yowled.

"M-Mapleshade? Thistleclaw?" Jaypaw blinked. It was Bumblepaw!

"Where's Foxpaw and Icepaw?" He asked. He dropped a sparrow and mouse to the ground. Food at last! Jaypaw sunk her claws in the mouse and dragged its lifeless body towards her. She began to explain what had happened.

Bumblepaw curled up beside her. "Hmm," He was thinking aloud.

Jaypaw twitched her whiskers. She pricked her ears to hear a slight

purr coming from Bumblepaw. Her ears were hot with embarrassment. Jaypaw stretched her neck to peer outside the small hollow. It was still snowing. Not lighter, but harder. When would it ever end. Jaypaw dug into her mouse and began to eat it. After she finished, she curled up beside Bumblepaw, their pelts brushing. *Do I like Bumblepaw?* Jaypaw shook her head and pushed the thought away. Bumblepaw was warm. Jaypaw began thinking of their kits. Afterlife. She wondered if she would get to the old forest. Get her warrior name. Come back, alive. Bumblepaw flicked an ear as a snow flurry blew in and swirled around the hollow. It touched the warmness of his pelt and melted away. Jaypaw closed her eyes. Sleep drifted over her once again.

Jaypaw snapped open her eyes. She felt lush grass beneath her paws. Ferns rippled in the wind. The breeze carried a strong scent. *Blood*! The blood roared in Jaypaw's ears. She ran in all directions. Shrieks and wails from cats were coming on the other side and the trees. Jaypaw darted up the tree and leaped on the other side. There. Many cats crowded around two cats. A small black tom with a white paw and a tattered purple collar studded with long, sharp dog teeth. And a huge tabby tom with a nick in his ear and a scar on the bridge of his nose. He seemed familiar. Tigerstar!

"Traitor!" Tigerstar growled. He leaped for the small black tom, his long, sharp claws unsheathed. The black tom was barley bigger than an apprentice! But the small black tom leaped to one side and struck a blow to Tigerstar's shoulder. Blood quickly spattered out of the wound but only hatred gleamed in Tigerstar's eyes. The black tom and Tigerstar flew through the air. Their eyes locked in contact. The black tom's an icy blue and Tigerstar's a dark amber. The black tom raised a paw, claws unsheathed. They shinned unnaturally in the sun. Jaypaw's heart beat faster. His claws were reinforced with long, sharpened dog's teeth. Then he slashed his claws into Tigerstar's throat. He ripped him down to the tail in a single slash. Tigerstar let out a wail of agony as his life spilled out of him. The cats only watched in horror. The black tom starred coldly at Tigerstar. Tigerstar breathed hard, blood bubbling from his mouth as he struggled to live. Then the massive tabby gave one last breath and fell limp. *He's losing a life*, Jaypaw thought. His body gave a jerk and he starred down at his wound as the blood

poured out of him in waves, engulfing the black tom's paws.

A name rang clearly in Jaypaw's ear. *Scourge*. That black tom is Scourge. After what seemed like forever, it was over. Tigerstar died. Lost all his nine lives- just like that. The most powerful cat in the forest had been stopped. Scourge lifted his blood soaked paw and grunted. "Your friend here tried to control us. He was wrong," He growled. He looked down at Tigerstar's body.

A flame-colored tom rose to his paws. Fear was his only expression. "W-We don't want to control you!" He stammered. It was Firestar.

Jaypaw snapped open her eyes. She was seeing the past. How Tigerstar had died. How Scourge had killed a leader with nine lives. Jaypaw had to get home.

Chapter 10

Ashstar snapped open his eyes. He looked down at his paws. *What....what is happing*? Ashstar felt something choking his throat. He looked at his belly. It was cut open. He wasn't gray. Instead, he was a dark tabby. Ashstar blinked. He scrambled to his paws. He coughed and spat out blood. It bubbled up from his mouth, making his mouth taste of blood. Ashstar closed his eyes. "*T-Tigerstar*?" He meowed. A ghostly figure slid out of him.

"Ashstar, as long as I'm with you, you'll have unlimited power. As I had said," Tigerstar meowed. "Let's keep this up."

Ashstar let out a small wail of fear. "No! You're hurting my daughter! My mate! My son," Ashstar meowed. He unsheathed his claws. "I must get rid of you," He growled.

Tigerstar drew his lips back in a snarl. "I don't care about your mate or your kits," He snapped. "They have to die. This is what power feels like. You have to kill your mate, or, at least get rid of her. And. Persuade your kits to join your rage to kill," Tigerstar meowed. "Now, remember the deal?"

Ashstar felt a growl rising in his throat. *I can't show my fear*. "I won't

let you hurt my daughter," He growled. "Or my mate and son!" He growled. He lunged for Tigerstar but he leaped onto Ashstar's back and drove in his claws. Ashstar wailed.

"I shall be back in business!" Tigerstar meowed in triumph. His soul slid back in Ashstar.

Ashstar narrowed his eyes. "I will kill my kin," He whispered. "Blood will rule ThunderClan."

Jaypaw parted her jaws to sniff the air. "Have you found anything? Foxpaw? Icepaw? Stonepaw?" She meowed.

Bumblepaw lifted his head. "Not yet," He meowed. He put his nose to the ground. "I think I found something!" He wailed.

"What? What?" Jaypaw meowed.

Bumblepaw darted into the bushes and raced through the snow covered forest.

Jaypaw followed him. There, Foxpaw lay on the ground. He was curled up beside Icepaw.

"Icepaw! Foxpaw!" Jaypaw and Bumblepaw called.

Icepaw rose to her paws. She gasped. "F-Foxpaw..."

"W-what? What happened?" Bumblepaw meowed.

"H-He won't wake up!" Icepaw meowed. "Oh no! Oh no!" Icepaw wailed.

"Foxpaw! Wake up!" Bumblepaw yowled. "Please!"

All of a sudden, Foxpaw twitched. "Cold....." He rasped.

"Don't worry! We'll get you somewhere warm!" Jaypaw promised.

"I shall have some cats to leave the Clan!" Ashstar yowled.

Meows of protest echoed through the Clan.

"Silence!" Ashstar meowed. "Which cat would like to leave the Clan?" He asked.

Squirrelflight rose to her paws. "I will!" She growled.

"Ok," Ashstar hissed. *Pathetic she cat.* "Anyone else?"

"I will!" Ferncloud yowled. "I won't stay with you and your cruel rules!" She hissed.

"We will leave!" Brightheart and Alderpaw and meowed. They stalked over to Ferncloud and Squirrelflight. "We're no use as warriors," Alderpaw hissed, his eyes narrowed.

"Very well," Ashstar meowed. "Daisy and Millie will leave the Clan!" He meowed.

"If Millie leaves, I leave to!" Graystripe hissed.

Briarpaw ran over to her father. "Graystripe, I'll come with you!" She meowed.

"So, Squirrelflight, Ferncloud, Brightheart, Alderpaw, Graystripe, Millie, Daisy, and Briarpaw will leave!" Ashstar meowed.

"I'll leave with Daisy and get my kits!" Spiderleg meowed.

"Spiderleg, you and your kits will stay. But, Hazeltail will leave. We have no room for weak warriors," Ashstar meowed. "So, leave my sight at once! I will take some warriors with me to escort you!" He hissed.

The escorts started padding away through the camp entrance, the escort patrol behind them.

"Get lost!" The warriors called as they ran off.

"What will we do now?" Graystripe meowed. "Two of my kits are missing!" He growled. "*Our* kits."

"My mate and kits are back at camp with that fox-hearted fool!" Daisy hissed. "I only have one of my kits," She licked in between

Hazeltail's ears.

"I have an idea," Brightheart meowed. "We should be safe at the Moonpool."

"Hmmm, I agree," Alderpaw, her apprentice, meowed. Alderpaw flicked his ear.

"Yes. Very well," Squirrelflight meowed. "We should go to the Moonpool," She meowed.

"Alright," Millie meowed. She rose to her paws. "We can't stay out in the open like this," She meowed.

"Wait!" Briarpaw meowed.

"What?" Ferncloud meowed.

"WindClan patrol!" Briarpaw yelped.

Ashfoot exploded from the ferns, Harespring at her side. Crowfeather, Tornear, Heathertail, Breezepelt, Willowclaw, and Sunpaw emerged.

"Has ThunderClan forgot about boundaries?" Ashfoot hissed. She unsheathed her claws and turned to her patrol. "I think we should teach them a lesson," She growled.

"Yeah!" Harespring meowed. He leaped onto Ferncloud.

Ferncloud bit his shoulder and clawed at his ears. Harespring hissed and clawed Ferncloud's flank.

"Attack!" Ashfoot hissed.

"Stop!" Squirrelflight rose her voice. "We never came here to fight! We left ThunderClan because of Ashstar!" She hissed.

"I'm sorry. I can't trust you," Ashfoot meowed. She sprang on Squirrelflight.

Squirrelflight battered at her belly. She kicked Ashfoot with her

hind legs.

Ashfoot scrambled to her paws.

"If you want to fight, we'll bring it!" Graystripe hissed. Briarpaw was hiding behind her mother Millie.

"We are not going to fight, we will leave," Squirrelflight glared at him.

"Are you to scared to fight?" Ashfoot hissed. She sprang on Squirrelflight again.

Biting her shoulder, Squirrelflight managed to shake her off. "Fine," She hissed. "Attack!" She yowled.

Ashfoot scrambled to her paws and leaped at Squirrelflight's side, clawing her flank.

Squirrelflight turned around and struck a blow to Ashfoot's shoulder. Ashfoot fell back and hit the ground. Squirrelflight leaped on top of Ashfoot and sunk her teeth into her throat. Ashfoot struggled beneath her.

"Let....go...!" She rasped.

Squirrelflight let go and saw the blood oozing from the WindClan deputy's throat. Blood bubbled in her mouth.

Squirrelflight felt the burning pain of the scratch on her flank and saw the blood staining her ginger fur. She held a paw on Ashfoot's throat, claws sheathed. "Give up?" Squirrelflight hissed.

"Don't kill me!" Ashfoot snapped, her eyes blazing.

As Squirrelflight was about to speak, Ashfoot sprang up and clawed a gash in Squirrelflight's ear. Blood spattered and hit Squirrelflight's eyes. Her eye burned. Ashfoot lashed out with her forepaw and knocked Squirrelflight back. She stumbled backwards and tripped over a rock.

Squirrelflight snapped open her eyes and turned her head. She was

dangling over the stream.

Ashfoot was on top of her. Her dark gray paw was placed on Squirrelflight's throat. "Once I kill you, ThunderClan will never mess with WindClan again!" Ashfoot growled.

All of a sudden, a dark gray pelt flashed and knocked down Ashfoot. It was Graystripe.

Squirrelflight rushed over to help Graystripe. He held down Ashfoot with his weight. His paw was raised, claws unsheathed. Then, he struck down and made Ashfoot screech in pain. Blood leaped out at Graystripe. "Never mess with ThunderClan again!" He hissed. He leaped off of Ashfoot.

Ashfoot staggered back. Her left eye was closed and bleeding. "You won't win so easily next time!" She growled. She lifted her head. "Retreat!" She yowled.

Squirrelflight staggered back. "Thank you. You saved my life," She meowed to Graystripe.

Graystripe purred. "No problem!" He got closer to Squirrelflight and they watched as the WindClan cats ran up the slopes in defeat.

"Come on. We have to hurry to the Moonpool!" Squirrelflight meowed.

Jaypaw, Bumblepaw, Icepaw, Stonepaw, and Foxpaw raced through the ThunderClan territory.

"We are almost there!" Jaypaw called to them. All of a sudden, they burst through the ThunderClan camp.

Ashstar starred at them. Every cat came running over. "Foxpaw! Icepaw! Bumblepaw! Jaypaw! Stonepaw!" The Clan yowled.

"Did you make it?" Ashstar growled.

Jaypaw felt bad to admit it. "N-No," She stammered. "W-we got lost!"

"Yeah!" Stonepaw growled. He stood beside his sister. "Foxpaw almost died!"

"I don't care. You didn't make it. Now, I shall ask you to leave the clan, you foolish apprentices!" Ashstar growled.

"W-what?" Cinderheart yowled. "No!" She hissed. She ran over the Jaypaw and Stonepaw. "If they leave, I leave to!" She growled.

Sorreltail ran over. "No! Cinderheart, I can't loose you! You are my only kit right now!" She cried.

"If you wish to leave, LEAVE!" Ashstar wailed.

"Ok, we'll leave," Cinderheart meowed.

"But, Bumblepaw, stay!" Ashstar growled.

"B-But!" Bumblepaw complained.

"Fine, Blossompaw will leave with you then," Ashstar meowed.

Blossompaw darted across the camp and touched muzzles with her brother. "Oh Bumblepaw, Graystripe and Millie left," She meowed. "Along with Briarpaw," She added.

"I won't leave my family alone in the forest!" Bumblepaw growled.

Chapter 11

"This.....this is bad," Ciderheart meowed. Sorreltail brushed beside her.

"It's ok. We.....we should find shelter here," She meowed.

Movement in the bushes caught Cinderheart's eye.

A dark gray pelt leaped.

Cinderheart sprang back.

"Cinderheart!" The tom gasped.

"Graystripe!" Cinderheart meowed.

"You left the Clan to?" Graystripe meowed.

Cinderheart sighed. "Yes," She meowed.

"Awww," Graystripe sighed. "Come with us!" He meowed.

"Graystripe!" Bumblepaw meowed. "I've missed you!" He purred.

Blossompaw came running over. "Graystripe!" She purred.

Heartbeats later, Graystripe was taking them to their camp.

"So...." Cinderheart began. "Where is this....camp? What's it like?" She meowed.

"We....uhhh.....decided to camp up in a tree," Graystripe stammered.

"We're cats, not squirrels," Sorreltail purred.

Cinderheart stiffened as she heard Graystripe's voice. "It's here!" He mewed.

Cinderheart sprang through the bushes and saw a tree. It was tall and had thick branches. Leaves were all around it in a bushy circle. Weak sunlight shone through the thick branches.

"Graystripe!" A voice called.

Three moons had passed. Cinderheart sat quietly beside her daughter Jaypaw and her son Stonepaw

"I don't get why Ashstar would throw us all out like that," Jaypaw was meowing.

"I know! I'm his son!" Stonepaw flicked his tail to his sister. "And you're his daughter!" He growled. He flicked his tail towards Cinderheart. "And you're his mate!" He growled.

Jaypaw sank her claws into the bark of the tree. "And Ashstar *fought* me," She put in.

"And he almost killed you!" Stonepaw growled.

Jaypaw felt her neck fur rise. Then a loud crack split the air.

Thunder crashed down on the tree that was five fox-lengths away from the tree they were on.

"Run!" A cat wailed.

Jaypaw saw her brother who was crouched on the tree limb. He

stared at the orange flames that were feeding off the tree. Jaypaw darted forward and grabbed her brother's scruff.

"Come on!" She growled. "Get to your paws!"

Stonepaw shot himself out of her teeth and raced down the tree. Jaypaw leaped down after him.

"Jaypaw! Look out!" Her brother wailed.

Jaypaw saw the tree tipping over. She shot herself forward and tumbled into him.

The tree, burnt from the fire, was already reaching them.

Jaypaw grabbed her brother by the scruff and shot forward, making her paws carry her as far as they could. She sprang past her Clanmates but then tumbled into a puddle of rain water. She stopped carrying her brother and went on ahead, running, running.....running....running.

I've got to get away, she thought.

She dived under ferns and twisted around the trunks of trees. Thunder cracked across the sky and a heavy rain started falling.

Got to get away. Away from everything.

Jaypaw stopped dead. She wouldn't abandon her Clanmates like this!

She turned tail and raced back.

Stonepaw shook raindrops from his fur. He looked around for Jaypaw, but didn't see anything. He stood silently in the puddle of water, its murky color engulfing his gray paws.

"Stonepaw!" A wail sounded from behind a tree.

Stonepaw thought he had lost his mind when he thought the tree was talking, but a gray she-cat stepped out.

Stonepaw ran forward to touch his sister's shoulder with his nose. "You kept running and running!" He meowed.

"I was sca-" She broke off as thunder cracked across the sky, lighting it up as it tore the sky like a claw.

"I was scared," Jaypaw's voice was filled with irritation and amusement.

"We have to find the group!" Stonepaw meowed.

Jaypaw trotted alongside her brother. The dark gray rain clouds had opened up to reveal the bright sun. Its rays warmed the pelts of the cats. Water dripped from leaf to leaf on a bush. Birds flew here and there, as if nothing had happened at all.

"Our home!" Graystripe wailed.

He stared up at the fire-burnt tree. The leaves were black and shriveled. The bark was stripped and black. The shadow of the tree hung on the ground, touching the leaves and bushes.

"We are homeless!" Squirrelflight growled. Her dark ginger tail lashed once and a heartbeat later it lashed again.

"You know what that means," Graystripe called. "We'll need a new home,"He finished and lashed his gray tail.

Millie stumbled over. "We can't move now, not when I'm about to have your kits," She meowed.

Graystripe's eyes widened with horror. "Well then, we need to *create* a shelter. First, we need to find sticks, rocks, brambles- anything that is a good barrier," Graystripe flicked his tail towards Ferncloud. "Ferncloud, Foxpaw, and Icepaw, I want you to search for brambles."

"I shall be the leader," Squirrelflight meowed. "I share Firestar's blood."

"Good. I'll be the deputy. I was once, and I'll be it again," Graystripe meowed.

"Graystripe, you and Bumblepaw, are going to collect the sticks," Squirrelflight meowed.

"On it!" Graystripe called. He raced off with his son behind him.

"Cinderheart and Stonepaw, collect rocks," Squirrelflight meowed.

Stonepaw started to move but stopped dead when he had heard Squirrelflight's voice.

"Wait! Get moss!" Squirrelflight meowed.

Stonepaw angled his ears. *A good but boring job*! Stonepaw bolted past the burnt tree and halted for Cinderheart to catch up.

"Now lets hurry. If we do, our paws will drop off once we come back!" Cinderheart purred.

"Will they really drop off?" Stonepaw asked. "We can't run without them!"

Cinderheart didn't reply, instead, she slipped past her son and stopped as she saw a tree, thickly growing with moss.

"Look," She meowed. "Moss."

Stonepaw lunged forward but landed in a large puddle of water. Water showered over him and the sun made the water drops glitter.

A shriek of alarm startled Stonepaw. He leaped back and stood beside his mother, bristling.

A black and white she-cat stepped out. Her forepaws touched the edge of the puddle.

"I'm lost!" She mewed. "Can you help me?" She asked.

Cinderheart stepped forward. "Where are you heading?" Her voice was gentle.

"My...uh....twolegs threw me out!" The she-cat growled. "They put me in their car and drove into the middle of this forest, then, they

left me out here to starve and die alone!" She exclaimed.

"Car?" Cinderheart mewed.

"A car! That piece of metal that has black paws!" The she-cat sounded irritated. Her pelt was matted and one of her ears was torn. She was thin, Stonepaw could see each of her ribs. Even a patch of fur was missing from her tail; it was crusted with died blood.

"I came across some other cats. I asked for help but all they did was rip me to shreds!" The she-cat mewed.

"What is your name?" Cinderheart meowed.

"Moss. My name is Moss," The she-cat replied.

"Well, we were collecting moss. We got thrown out of our Clan for..uh...no reason," Cinderheart meowed. "Help us carry some moss and we'll take you to our camp-or-what's left of it."

Stonepaw's jaws were filled with the bitter tasting moss. Its flavor still hung in his mouth.

As they entered camp, Stonepaw could see that cats were weaving brambles around trees and there was already a fresh-kill pile.

"Who's that?" Squirrelflight mewed.

"Hi? I'm Moss!" Moss meowed.

"Can we let her stay?" Cinderheart meowed. "I mean-we can't just leave her to starve in the forest!"

"Alright," Squirrelflight meowed. "Lets announce it," She turned and bounded over to a rock that was jutting out of the ground. "Gather around!" She called.

"Follow," Cinderheart beckoned Moss with her tail.

Stonepaw followed them and saw that Moss didn't have a collar.

"Who's that?" Jaypaw, who had just come up, was asking her brother.

"You'll see. We found her when we were collecting moss. And- oh, hey, her name is Moss," Stonepaw meowed.

"When Cinderheart and Stonepaw were hunting for moss, like I had told them, they found a she-cat there," Squirrelflight meowed. She flicked her tail to Moss so the kittypet could explain.

"My name is Moss. My twolegs threw me out. They put me in their car and drove off!" Moss explained.

Cats were cocking their heads and confusion slipped from their pelts.

"A car is a monster. Whatever you cats call it," Moss sighed.

The cats started looking impressed.

Stonepaw heard the birds singing. It was close to night. The leaves of a nearby tree swayed and made Stonepaw dizzy. His eyes flickered towards the setting sun, it was hiding behind a huge dark gray cloud. *That one's full of rain...* Stonepaw snapped his head back to Squirrelflight.

"Moss is now a cat of our group!" She called.

"And Sorreltail, I want you to train Moss. She'll now be Mosspaw."

"Mosspaw! Mosspaw! Mosspaw!" The cats mewled.

Chapter 12 allegiances

The Group Allegiances [Incase you wanted to know]

Group Leader: Squirrelflight- Dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Briarpaw

Group Deputy: Graystripe- Long-haired gray tom

Apprentice, Mosspaw

Group Medicine cats: Brightheart- White she-cat with ginger patches

Apprentice, Alderpaw

Group Warriors:

Ferncloud- Pale gray (With darker flecks) she-cat with green eyes

Hazeltail- Small gray-and-white she-cat

Apprentice, Icepaw

Sorreltail- Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Apprentice, Foxpaw

Cinderheart- Gray tabby she-cat

Group Apprentices:

Foxpaw- Reddish tabby tom

Icepaw- White she-cat

Briarpaw- Dark brown she-cat

Bumblepaw- Very pale gray tom with black stripes

Blossompaw- Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

Stonepaw- Gray tom with amber eyes

Jaypaw- Gray she-cat with blue eyes

Mosspaw- Small black-and-white she-cat

Group Queens:

Daisy- Cream long-furred she-cat from the horseplace

Millie- Striped gray tabby she-cat (Mother to Graystripe's kits: Bramblekit; Brown tabby tom, Hawkkit; Brown tabby tom with a white paw, Rowankit; Golden tom with light brown stripes)

Chapter 12

Jaypaw woke to the sound of rain. It was faint.

"Come on! We've got to strengthen our barrier. You don't want a fox to get in!" Jaypaw could hear Squirrelflight ordering cats around.

"Jaypaw!" Stonepaw mewed. "You're coming with me and Ferncloud to collect brambles!"

Jaypaw's head thudded on the roof of the tree branch. Yes, the apprentices den was a thick branch with overhanging brambles. It was crowded, but you'd always be warm.

Jaypaw ducked her head out of the den. The morning sun was just rising, making the clouds look pink. The sky looked like an ocean of gold.

Stonepaw was waiting beside the newly-made fresh-kill pile. There wasn't much in the pile, but there were mice and sparrows mainly. Now Jaypaw wondered how great Leaf-bare would go. Her mentor Millie was nursing her kits and Jaypaw had to wait until they became apprentices.

"Jaypaw," Ferncloud mewed.

"Yeah?" Jaypaw prompted.

"Please hurry," Ferncloud meowed.

Jaypaw felt sorry for Ferncloud. She lost her mate. Even her brother had gone insane.

They started walking through the forest, ignoring the way to ThunderClan and WindClan territory. Jaypaw could see the lake, the sun's rays clawing it into gold and gray.

The ferns rustled and a mouse scurried out. Ferncloud slammed down her paws on the small creature, and it fell limp beneath her paws. "We'll come back for it later," She meowed as she buried it.

Jaypaw parted a huge clump of long grass and saw brambles clinging to a tree. "Look!" She called. She sprang herself forward and landed a whisker-length from the brambles. She carefully put her paws on the tree and unsheathed her claws. Raking them under the brambles, she was able to pull them free. A thorn had caught the fur around her pads, but didn't draw any blood.

She picked up the brambles in her jaws, making sure the stem part she'd have in mouth didn't have any thorns. The leaves brushed her muzzle and chest fur as she walked back towards her Clanmates.

Ferncloud was sitting beside the stump of a tree, which was growing with moss. A small ant mound was a fox-length away from the tree stump.

"Oh, now we've got to wait for Stonepaw," Ferncloud's meow was muffled by the brambles.

"I've found a little!" Stonepaw meowed with delight. He exploded from the bushes and landed on his paws, tripping over the bramble stem that hung from his mouth.

Ferncloud's whiskers twitched with amusement. Jaypaw and Stonepaw were part of Ferncloud's kin. And Cinderheart had named Jaypaw after Jayfeather because he was Lionblaze's brother.

"Let's get home," Ferncloud meowed.

Spiderleg shifted in his mossy bed. He couldn't sleep. He missed his mother. She'd left the Clan. Along with Daisy. An idea popped up in his head. He would go with Birchfall and leave the Clan. Perfect.

Birchfall stirred in his nest. And Spiderleg would get Rosekit and Toadkit from the nursery.

Spiderleg walked over to Birchfall. The brown tabby was asleep in his nest. Spiderleg prodded him in the side.

"What?" Birchfall moaned. He slumped over.

"Come on. We're leaving this stupid excuse of a Clan," Spiderleg hissed. "I don't want my kits getting hurt!" He flicked his tail towards the den entrance. "I'm getting Rosekit and Toadkit."

Birchfall blinked up at him. "B-but..." He began. "Whitewing has to come. Even Dovekit and Ivykit!" He rose to his paws, looking around the den.

Spiderleg followed his gaze and landed his eyes on a white she-cat. Whitewing. She stumbled awake as Birchfall prodded her.

Birchfall and Spiderleg explained what they were going to do. Whitewing strongly agreed.

Spiderleg carried Rosekit, while Birchfall and Whitewing carried Dovekit and Ivykit. Spiderleg planned to go back for Toadkit. But the sound of paw steps made him freeze.

"Spiderleg?" He turned to see Ashstar. The gray ThunderClan leader looked fearful and sad for some reason.

"Yes?" Spiderleg tired not to sound afraid.

"Thornclaw!" Ashstar yowled. His deputy padded up to him. "Why don't you chase off these traitors for me?"

Thornclaw unsheathed his claws. "Oh, this will be fun!" He meowed.

Spiderleg ran towards the camp entrance, Rosekit mewling in his jaws.

"Where are we going, father?" She meowed.

"Escaping from these bad cats!" Spiderleg meowed. "Come on!" He screamed at his paws.

All of a sudden, a snarl erupted from the bushes. A fox darted out and grabbed Ashstar by the throat. Spiderleg ignored Ashstar's shrieks of pain and kept running.

"W-where is the group???" Spiderleg growled.

Birchfall bumped into him. "I don't know!" He meowed.

"Cinderheart? Ferncloud?" Spiderleg called.

"We can track them by scent. And I know my mother's scent," Whitewing put her nose to the ground.

Spiderleg waited for Whitewing to find a scent. His paws itched to get moving. He then wondered what Toadkit was doing.

"Found Brightheart's scent!" Whitewing meowed. She darted through the trees, Dovekit in her mouth.

"Wait up!" Spiderleg called.

Cinderheart, Jaypaw, Stonepaw, and Graystripe were on patrol. They were just returning when they heard a voice.

"Ferncloud?" A voice called.

Graystripe halted. "Wait a second. That sounds like Spiderleg. What does he want?" Graystripe padded towards a thick clump of ferns that was growing near a tree.

"Spiderleg? Is that you?" Graystripe called.

A black tom burst through the bushes, a creamy colored she-kit in his jaws.

Birchfall appeared beside Spiderleg, a silver-and-gray she-kit in his jaws. And Whitewing appeared with a gray she-kit in her jaws.

"Birchfall? Spiderleg? Whitewing? Why are you here?" Graystripe

meowed.

"We escaped from our Clan. We couldn't be back with Ashstar anymore. But I have to go back and find Toadkit!" He raced off.

Chapter 13

Ashstar padded around in the medicine den. "Stupid Spiderleg and Birchfall! I'll kill them next time I see them!" He swore. "I have no medicine cats to heal this infected throat wound!" He pushed all the herbs off of the shelves of the medicine den. "But death is only for the weak!" He unsheathed his claws, laughing with a deep rasp in his throat.

Blood gurgled in his mouth as a ghostly spirit came from him.

"Tigerstar," Ashstar slumped on the ground. "I-I can't do this anymore.."

"But power is what you wanted right?" Tigerstar growled.

"Every cat hates me because of what I've become. They're leaving my Clan," Ashstar rasped. "I don't want power anymore, make it stop!"

"If I leave you, no cat will change, Ashstar," Tigerstar informed. "With my power, every cat will soon see."

Ashstar stood. "I said I don't want your power anymore!" He hissed.

Tigerstar stood. "You want a battle? Well come into the forest for one!" His spirit faded away.

Ashstar stood. *Great, he's gone. Tigerstar made me kill all those cats.*

He twitched an ear and padded out of the den. *I don't want to battle, but to settle things out, I will.*

By the moment Ashstar was in the forest, he was knocked over. Instantly, he lashed out and hit Tigerstar. Both of the cats got up, shaking their pelts.

"Alright, let me just finish you," Tigerstar sighed. "I'll make your death slow and painful. I hope you've lived your life well."

"I don't think I have, thanks to you!" Ashstar leaped on the dark tabby. He sank his teeth into Tigerstar's throat, but the tabby landed a hard blow to the side of Ashstar's face. Ashstar bit harder and let go.

He stood and Tigerstar, as fast as lightning, darted forward under Ashstar's belly, slicing it open. Ashstar slumped to the ground, feeling his blood pool underneath him.

Tigerstar turned him over and placed a paw, claws unsheathed, on his throat. He sank them in, but they barley cut into Ashstar's skin.

"I told you I'd make your death slow," Tigerstar laughed, pushing his claws in a bit deeper. "Now just relax as your first life ebbs away."

Ashstar struggled under Tigerstar's grip, then fell still. *No, I can't waste my energy*. He felt Tigerstar's long claws sink deeper in his throat. Now blood oozed and Ashstar's breath was getting weak. *Oh StarClan, help me*!

Tigerstar seemed to be reading his mind. "StarClan won't help you now. They're just a foolish group of cats who read the stars."

"How can you say StarClan are foolish? You got your lives from them!" Ashstar meowed.

Tigerstar narrowed his eyes. "Well..." He began. "Stop trying to trick me!"

Ashstar felt his claws sink deeper, and now he was struggling to breath.

"Hey! Stop!" A voice yowled. A small gray apprentice darted out of the bushes and jumped on Tigerstar. She landed on him and sliced at his eyes and muzzle, then aimed a final blow to his nose. While Tigerstar was stunned, she walked over to Ashstar.

Ashstar got up, looking into her blue eyes. "Jaypaw...."

Jaypaw looked up at him. "I saved you. Now all you do is stare?" Jaypaw hissed.

"Jaypaw, all of the things I've done wasn't my fault," Ashstar began to explain everything.

"So that's why you made us leave," Jaypaw then bristled. "He's getting up!"

"Do you think I would let an apprentice beat me?" Tigerstar rasped as he got up. "Think again, stupid apprentice!"

Ashstar stood in front of Jaypaw, his tail lashing. "Don't lay a claw on her, Tigerstar."

"Look what she did to me!" Tigerstar hissed. "I can't see with all this blood dripping into my eyes!"

Ashstar leaped on Tigerstar, sinking his claws in his shoulder. Tigerstar lashed out and hit Ashstar's throat.

Ashstar gasped with pain and staggered back. He fell on the ground, blood pooling from his throat. *Tigerstar can't hurt Jaypaw*!

Jaypaw leaped on Tigerstar, sinking her claws and teeth into his neck. His struggles and blows became weaker as she chomped down harder.

"This is what you get!" Jaypaw hissed.

The dark tabby finally fell limp in her grip. She stepped away, but Tigerstar faded into the air.

Jaypaw was confused when he faded, but she thought nothing of it. She ran over to Ashstar. *He won't fade away, will he*? As she reached

his side, Ashstar lay still, blood pooling from his throat and belly. Jaypaw sunk her teeth in his scruff, and dragged her father in the grass.

Ashstar opened his eyes. His wounds felt better, but he was with Jaypaw, Stonepaw, and Cinderheart. He tried to lift his head, but a white paw pushed him back down.

"No, no, lay down and rest. You've lost your first life," Brightheart was meowing.

"C-cinderheart.." Ashstar rasped.

Cinderheart stepped closer to him and crouched beside her mate. "I wish I could've seen the other side of you before. I'm sorry."

"It's ok," Ashstar meowed.

"Every cat get out of the den so Ashstar can rest. Since his fine side has returned, I guess we'll be going back to the Clan. Isn't that right?" Brightheart looked down at him.

"Yes. Every cat in this group will be going back to the Clan with me," Ashstar meowed.

Cinderheart stepped out of the medicine den with Jaypaw and Stonepaw close to her side.

Then Squirrelflight stepped in. "So, Ashstar. It's time your bright side revealed?" She snarled.

"Didn't Jaypaw tell you the story?" Ashstar demanded. "I was being controlled by Tigerstar!"

"Controlled or not, I still blame you for Hollyleaf's, Jayfeather's, and Lionblaze's deaths," Squirrelflight turned and padded out of the den.

Ashstar set his head on his paws. *I guess I killed those three cats by myself, but now Squirrelflight doesn't like me*.

"Ashstar, just rest, don't think about the past," Brightheart meowed.

"I guess you're right," Ashstar meowed as he curled up for sleep.

Chapter 14

Ashstar woke up. His head snapped up as claws scrapped outside of the den.

"Ashstar, you awake?" A voice meowed.

Ashstar blinked sleepily. "Uhhh, yeah. Do you need me?" He asked.

Squirrelflight padded in the den. "We are going to leave and go back to ThunderClan camp, and you have to come with us."

Ashstar stood up. "Oh, I almost forgot," He meowed. He flicked his gray tail. "I'll lead you all towards ThunderClan camp."

Squirrelflight walked out of the den.

Ashstar padded after her. He slipped out of the den, and the whole group of cats were waiting.

"Ok. Lets go!" He called out to them.

"Ashstar, maybe we should rest here to hunt," Graystripe meowed.

"Good point. I can hear everyone's stomach growling like a badger," Ashstar meowed. He also felt icy claws tearing at his belly. "Seems like I'm hungry too."

After a while of hunting, Ashstar was able to catch a thrush, a crow, and a mouse. He sat down and started to eat his mouse, but he then noticed Spiderleg yelling at Daisy. Spiderleg then hissed and swiped a paw at her cheek. Daisy staggered to the ground, her cheek

oozing blood.

Ashstar growled in annoyance, finished his mouse, and walked over to Daisy, looking at her for a moment. "Are you ok?" He asked.

"What? Yeah," Daisy meowed. "My kits are hungry, and so are Millie's new litter. Would you hunt food for them?" She asked.

Ashstar then thought of hunting down more prey. That would keep them here till sun down. He walked into bunches of thick growth.

Ashstar wasn't far into the forest until he had heard twigs snapping and leaves crunching. A heavy body knocked into him, sending him staggering into the bushes.

"Spiderleg! How dare you harm your own mate!" Ashstar snapped.

"My parents never paid any attention to me. Now I'll pay no attention to my kits. They can grow up without a *father*," Spiderleg hissed.

Ashstar's eyes widened. He lashed his tail. "You've said something wrong."

"Yeah? Like you ate into my life. I only left the Clan to be with Daisy and her kits because I wanted to make other cats think that I still loved her. I never told her that we weren't mates anymore. I never tried to fight my kits," Spiderleg replied dryly.

Ashstar unsheathed his claws and padded closer.

Spiderleg put his paw back. "W-what are you doing?" He asked in a surprised voice.

Ashstar leaped on the tall black tom. He slashed his throat over and over, till darker blood sprang into his eyes and blinded him.

Ashstar staggered back and fell back into a thorn bush. He got up, thorns still snagged in his gray pelt. "I'll kill you!" He yowled.

Ashstar leaped over to Spiderleg. But the black tom lay on the ground, limp. Dark red blood pooled around his throat and under

his head. His amber eyes were dull with surprise.

Ashstar's eyes widened with horror, and he felt like he couldn't breathe.

"No..no," He gasped. "I'm sorry!" He mewed. He threw his head to the ground. "What kind of cat am I?" He asked himself. "I'm a monster!" He lashed his tail, his laughs turning creepy. "N-no one will know..." He meowed.

Ashstar slashed at a bush until leaves covered his paws. He swept the leaves towards Spiderleg. As he was beginning to leave for a hunt, he looked back at Spiderleg's body. Blood-stained leaves were being carried by the howling wind, and others were being scattered everywhere.

Ashstar lifted his head towards the moon. "I've become insane!"

"Where is Spiderleg? He should be here!" Squirrelflight meowed.

"Well, we shouldn't wait on that bossy fur ball," Graystripe retorted.

"Tell me about it," Hazeltail agreed.

"Where is he?" Ferncloud meowed. "I can't lose another one of my kits!" She wailed. "Spiderleg!" She started calling out. "Birchfall, help me find him!"

Ashstar winced as thunder cracked the sky. Heavy rain pelted down. *StarClan are punishing me*.

"Ashstar! You went out hunting by yourself last night! Did you see or hear Spiderleg?" Daisy ran up to him.

Ashstar shrugged his shoulders. "I head a fox howling last night," He lied.

"Maybe a fox got him, you think?" Squirrelflight padded up.

"Why are all those thorns snagged in your pelt?" Graystripe asked.

"I was hunting a bird in a tree and it flew," Ashstar began. "And I slipped off the tree and fell into a thorn bush," Ashstar lied.

"Well..." Squirrelflight began. She fluffed out her tail. "A fox must have killed him."

Daisy looked a bit shocked, but then her eyes turned to slits. "He never cared about me anyway," She hissed.

Ashstar lashed his tail. "Spiderleg attacked her last night and fled into the woods," He meowed.

"Is that why you have that scratch on your cheek?" Squirrelflight asked.

Daisy dipped her head. "Yes."

Ashstar just wanted to leave already. "Come on guys! We need to get home. If a fox got him, then it did. We'll only waste time looking for his dead body," Ashstar meowed.

Squirrelflight's ears flicked in surprise. "I guess you're right," She meowed.

"Yes, there's nothing we can do about it," Graystripe meowed.

"No!" Ferncloud meowed. "What if he's alive out there?" She asked.

Ashstar fluffed up his tail. "If you want to go search for him yourself like a mother would, go do that," He hissed to his sister. He laid his eyes on his troubled Clan-group. "Come on, we're going."

"Fine," Ferncloud spat. She turned towards the thick part of the forest. "I'll be on my way," She raced off.

Ashstar didn't want to lose his sister, but she was Spiderleg's mother. No cat would find out that Ashstar had killed Spiderleg.

Chapter 15

"So, you changed?" A voice snapped Ashstar's eyes open. He turned to see Thistleclaw.

"Please!" Ashstar hissed. "Leave me alone! I don't want anymore of your power!" He leaped on Thistleclaw and slashed his eyes. The gray-and-white patched body slithered from under him and slashed Ashstar's nose.

Ashstar staggered back.

"It's not that easy to kill me," Thistleclaw meowed.

"And it's not that easy to kill me either!" Ashstar meowed. He sprang back at Thistleclaw and bit down hard on his ear.

Thistleclaw slashed at his muzzle and pushed Ashstar away. "You really need to work on your training!" He hissed to Ashstar.

Thistleclaw leaped at Ashstar, but Ashstar crouched low to the ground. Thistleclaw rolled on the ground and down a low hill. His body hit a rock and he stretched in pain.

"You need to work on landing!" Ashstar taunted. He leaped down the hill and slashed Thistleclaw's belly.

The Dark Forest tom screeched in pain. He slithered around like a dying snake.

Ashstar was about to wait for Thistleclaw to get up when...

"Thistleclaw!" A voice spat.

Ashstar turned around to see Hawkfrost.

The dark brown tabby tom padded closer and into the light.

"It seems Thistleclaw is as weak as a little kittypet," Hawkfrost spat. His voice sounded disappointed.

Ashstar turned to face him. "I guess he was. But we're done training now," He meowed, his blue eyes troubled.

"Oh, no you aren't done training," Hawkfrost informed. He smiled and lashed his tail.

"What?" Ashstar asked. "I'm not done?" He was surprised.

"Finish it."

Ashstar's eyes widened. "N-no!" He hissed. He crouched in front of Thistleclaw. "I'm not killing him."

Hawkfrost narrowed his eyes. "Look. Kill him and we won't bother you again," He meowed. He unsheathed his claws. "Before I kill you myself!"

"Fine!" Ashstar cried. He closed his eyes and slammed his claws into Thistleclaw's throat.

He opened one eye and saw Thistleclaw's beaten and broken body. He faded into thin air.

"See? That wasn't so bad. Now Thistleclaw can only be heard as a voice in our dreams," Hawkfrost meowed.

"So- he's not dead?" Ashstar mewed.

"No. And Tigerstar isn't either. But now they're just voice that can only be heard in our dreams," Hawkfrost meowed. He narrowed his eyes. "Now wake up before you bleed to death."

Jaypaw walked beside her brother. She leaned towards him.

"This is sooo boring. I just want to hunt. Patrolling borders is just boring," Jaypaw grunted.

"This is fun! Our first patrol as true ThunderClan apprentices!" Stonepaw meowed.

"Dream on," Jaypaw grumbled. She padded forward and saw Bumblepaw.

"Hi Bumblepaw!" She greeted him.

"Hello Jaypaw!" Bumblepaw greeted her back.

Jaypaw flicked her tail. "So... how long until you're a warrior?" She asked.

"Not long," Bumblepaw lifted his head and closed his eyes. "But its been forever."

Jaypaw dipped her head, her ears flicking in embarrassment. "Well...I," She began.

Stonepaw bounded up to her, bouncing on his paws. "Jaypaw! We're going to be warriors soon!" He meowed.

Jaypaw almost stopped dead in her tracks. "When?" She pricked her ears.

"Tomorrow!" Stonepaw mewed. "That means we can lead patrols! And we also don't have to worry about the elders!"

"I'm becoming a warrior today! Even Briarpaw and Blossompaw as well!" Bumblepaw meowed.

Jaypaw stumbled along. She sighed. "I wish I was becoming a warrior today," She meowed.

"Bumblepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" Ashstar asked.

Bumblepaw lifted his head. "I do!" He mewed.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Bumblepaw, from this moment you will be known as Bumblestripe. StarClan honors your courage, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan," Ashstar finished. He rested his muzzle on the new warrior's head, and Bumblestripe licked his shoulder in return.

"Briarlight! Blossomfall! Bumblestripe!" The Clan cheered.

Ashstar saw his daughter and son in the crowd. They both looked proud, and eager to become warriors. Ashstar flicked his ears. *Don't worry, you'll be a warrior soon.*

As soon as the Clan was breaking up, Ashstar bounded down towards Jaypaw and Stonepaw.

"Don't worry," He told them. "You'll be a warrior as soon as you know it!" He meowed.

Jaypaw grunted slightly. "But that's tomorrow!" She complained.

"I know," Ashstar meowed. "But sometimes you have to wait."

Jaypaw looked up at her father. "But I've worked my tail off!" She meowed. "And I had a kittypet as a mentor!" Her eyes flashed as if she could still remember Ashstar's evil times.

"I know," Ashstar repeated. He flicked his tail towards her. "You need to wait like every other apprentice did," He told her.

Jaypaw sighed but flicked her ear at him like she'd understood.

Ashstar paced around his den, wondering what to do. He then sighed and slumped down into her nest, hurting his shoulder. *Whatever, I'm tired as ever.*

He snapped open his eyes and found himself in the stupid Dark Forest again. But there were no trees. He was in a pitch black void. Ashstar found himself all alone in this dark place. He sat down. *I'm not sure about walking in this place. I don't even know it.*

"Hello, Ashstar," A voice hissed from the darkness.

"T-tigerstar?" Ashstar hissed in confusion.

"It's me," Tigerstar meowed.

"But...I can't see you! I can only hear you," Ashstar meowed, his eyes flashing.

"I can see you and hear you. But you can only hear me, because I'm dead," Tigerstar meowed.

"I'm sorry for failing to kill you," Ashstar meowed. "I just- I just lost my focus for a bit!" He told Tigerstar.

Flames lit up all around him, and red, glowing eyes peered from the flames.

"I'm training you now," Tigerstar meowed. "Shadows, attack!"

Ashstar stood still, his paws still as stone. "What?! I don't want to train!"

The red eyes peered closer, revealing their sharp white teeth and claws.

"Tigerstar, please!! I don't want to train!" Ashstar howled. But deep down, he knew he had to do this. He unsheathed his claws. *I just wanna get this over with*!

Black cats with glowing, red eyes and glowing claws and teeth leaped out from the flames. Their eyes were battle and blood hungry.

Ashstar dodged from one side until a shadowy cat took hold of his leg. He turned around and slashed at it's stupid red eyes. He kept slashing until the red faded away.

"Don't let your enemies have the advantage," Tigerstar's voice echoed around the void.

Ashstar felt the bodies of the shadow cats build up on his back. He

felt his blood spill out of him, and claws slash and tear at his pelt. He twisted around and bit into the throat of one of the cats. Blood gushed into his mouth and he let go, seeing the cat's red eyes fade.

Claws hooked into his throat. Ashstar whipped around and slashed at the cat. He kept slashing and turned to slash at the others on his body. But the weight crushed his back and he stumbled over and felt claws tear into his belly. He held back a screech of pain, but it came out instead.

He struggled under the lump of claws and fur, but it was no hope. His eyes were closing slowly, and his vision was clouding. What will happen now? What will Tigerstar do to me?

Chapter 16

"Jaypaw, you will now be known as Jaywing. StarClan honors your strength and skill," Ashstar rested his muzzle on her head, and she licked his shoulder in response.

Jaywing watched as Ashstar turned towards Stonepaw.

"Stonepaw, you will now be known as Stoneheart. StarClan honors your loyalty and courage," Ashstar did the same to Stoneheart.

"Jaywing! Stoneheart! Dovepaw! Ivypaw! Rosepaw! Toadpaw!" The Clan cheered.

"I can't believe it!" Jaywing purred. "We're warriors!" She mewed.

Stoneheart flicked his tail. "That means that it's twice as fun!" He meowed. "In hunting, battle-"

"Battling?" Jaywing cut her brother off. She lashed her tail. "Since when has battling been fun?"

Stoneheart dipped his head. "I...uhhh," He began.

"Guys!" Cinderheart called. "Do you not realize what's happening?"

Jaywing looked down towards her Clan. She saw Blackstar with his deputy Russetfur. Both of the ShadowClan cats were arguing with Ashstar.

"Does he need help?" Jaywing asked. She flicked an ear towards her mother.

"No," Cinderheart told her. "But lets go down there."

"We've caught ThunderClan scent on our territory!" Blackstar hissed to Ashstar.

Ashstar staggered back a bit. He narrowed his eyes and looked around his Clan.

"Did any cat set paw on the ShadowClan border?" He asked.

The clearing fell silent.

Ashstar turned to Blackstar. "Then no. My cats haven't been on your territory."

Blackstar narrowed his eyes. "You've lied once," He said, unsheathing his claws. "And you'll see what happens if you lie again."

Ashstar narrowed his eyes and flattened his ears. "What do you mean?" He asked. He lashed his tail.

"Oh I'll show you what I mean," Blackstar meowed. As fast as lightning, he struck Ashstar's throat with his claws.

Blood gushed out of the wound, but Ashstar didn't collapse. Instead, he struck out at Blackstar. The huge white tom let out a moan of horror, but before he could fight back, Ashstar lashed out again. He stood his ground, no matter if his blood spilled out on his paws.

Blackstar thrashed slowly on the ground, then fell limp.

Russetfur gasped with horror. "This wasn't supposed to happen! Blackstar was supposed to kill you!"

Ashstar turned to her with hard effort. "This was a set up?" He asked.

Russetfur turned on him. "Yes! Blackstar was supposed to kill you! But you killed him and that was his last life!" She cried.

Shocked gasps echoed around the clearing.

Ashstar bared his teeth at her. "He was old. He was a traitor and

killed Stonefur," Ashstar told her.

"No. You are actually the murderer!" Russetfur snapped. "Now it's time you paid!"

Before she could leap, Ashstar's Clanmates hurled themselves at Russetfur and drove her back towards the Thorn-barrier.

"Leave my camp and Clan alone. Have fun becoming ShadowClan's new leader," Ashstar told her. He let Russetfur drag Blackstar's dead body back to ShadowClan.

Ashstar could've died if he hadn't of killed Blackstar, and Russetfur didn't understand that, Jaywing thought.

"Well then, it looks like Ashstar isn't the only murderer around," Jaywing told herself.

"Hey Jaywing!" A booming voice greeted.

Jaywing's fur spiked up. She felt her pelt calm down as she saw Bumblestripe.

"Hello!" He greeted again. "Jaywing, you don't have bees in your ears, do you?" He asked.

"No!" Jaywing felt her ears get hot and catch and fire.

Bumblestripe narrowed his eyes. "Why are you so red?" He asked. "Did you eat crow-food?"

Jaywing let herself relax. "N-no," She rasped. "In fact, I haven't eaten at all!" She said quickly. She turned her back towards him. "Hear you later!" She mumbled.

"What?" Bumblestripe asked.

Jaywing stalked away without replying. *He's got a big mouth, but a small pair of ears*!

Stoneheart pushed towards her. "Hey Jaywing," He meowed. "Do you want to hunt with me?" He asked.

Jaywing lashed her tail. She only wanted to be alone for some time.

"Please, Stoneheart, leave me alone!" She meowed to him. "We can hunt later!"

Her brother's eyes seemed to dull. "Oh-okay," He mewed. His head hung low as he padded off. "I guess I'll hunt by myself," He mewed.

Jaywing felt sorry for her brother, but she only wanted alone time for herself.

Thornclaw padded up to her. "Jaywing. I have to warn you that no cat can leave camp for patrols," He told her.

Jaywing instantly felt interested and pricked her ears. "Why?" She asked.

"Ashstar thinks that every cat needs a bit of rest for now. And only one or two cats can go hunting," He explained the rest of what cats were doing around here.

Jaywing looked at him with sparks in her eyes. "I wanted to go out into the forest for some alone time. You know, before my night vigil started," She meowed. Jaywing felt pressured. "But I understand if I can't leave camp."

Thornclaw sighed. "You can go. But don't stay out to long!" He meowed.

Jaywing walked off, a mouse in her jaws.

She reached the edge of the border, WindClan's stream. *I'll take a drink from here.*

As she lifted her head up, she noticed that cats were coming down the slop. *WindClan? I hope they don't mind me taking a drink*! But the WindClan cats padded towards her.

"Stop right there!" One of them meowed.

"Crowfeather-" A she-cat meowed.

"Shut it, Nightcloud!" Crowfeather snapped at her.

"What are you doing? Why are you drinking from our stream?" A WindClan tom asked.

"Your stream?" Jaywing snapped. "This stream is ours, as well as yours!" She meowed.

Crowfeather stepped forward. "Is that WindClan prey?" He asked Jaywing. He bristled and flattened his ears. "You can't steal our prey!" He snapped.

"What?" Jaywing was shocked. "This came from ThunderClan!" She then crouched down. "WindClan doesn't hunt mice!" She meowed.

Crowfeather looked surprised and crouched down. "Are you making fun of WindClan?"

"Enough!" A gray she-cat stepped from the bunch of bristling WindClan cats. "There will be no fighting. None," She meowed to the patrol.

"First," Crowfeather began, "I need to teach her a lesson."

The gray she-cat looked at him. "What do you mean?" She asked.

"With claws. Words will not handle this!" Crowfeather meowed. "Stand back, Ashfoot!" He snapped.

Ashfoot didn't step back. She looked like she was trying to hold back a hiss. "Crowfeather, there's no need for this!" She snapped.

Without warning, he leaped.

Jaywing winced as he instead ended up rolling down the slope, head-first in the water.

"Crowfeather!" Ashfoot meowed.

Jaywing felt sorry for the gray tom.

But Crowfeather resurfaced and pulled himself up the bank. He

shook out his pelt and stood. "This is all your fault!" He meowed. Twitching an ear, he unsheathed his claws.

"Lets fight!" Without warning, he leaped at Jaywing.

Jaywing rolled to one side but tripped and fell towards the bank of the stream. A voice whispered inside her head: *Don't let him pin you down or you're crow-food.*

But before Jaywing could move, a heavy body slammed into her and pinned her to the ground.

"Thought you could win?" Crowfeather snarled. "Think again! Making my nose bleed isn't enough to kill me!" He put his paw on her throat.

"Crowfeather!" Ashfoot meowed. "For the last time. I'm your deputy as well as your mother. Should you ever kill a cat for no reason?" She asked.

Crowfeather turned his head towards her. "N-no," He replied dryly.

"Then come back over here!" Ashfoot snapped.

"Fine. But she's stealing WindClan prey!" Crowfeather shot back at his mother.

"Crowfeather. I said now," Ashfoot meowed.

"Fine," Crowfeather repeated. He looked back down at Jaywing, hatred in his eyes. "You just think you're special," He hissed to her in a whisper.

As Crowfeather leaped back across the stream, his patrol left and continued on.

Jaywing crouched down to eat her prey.

"Well look who we've found," A cat meowed from behind her.

Jaywing's eyes widened and she slowly turned her head. ShadowClan!

Russetstar and Tawnypelt were together.

"We've found the daughter of Ashstar and Cinderheart. How lovely, I've always wanted to ruin Ashstar's family line. How fun it'd be," Russetstar meowed. "So that's why we're kidnapping you!"

Jaywing only wanted to run. "P-please don't hurt me," She rasped.

"Spit it kid, we only want to take you!" Russetstar meowed.

"Stop what you're doing!" Jaywing turned to see her father, Ashstar.

He padded towards them. "Russetstar, I've had enough of your stupid little games, leave or else!" He flicked his tail towards the forest behind him and Thornclaw and Bumblestripe appeared. "Four against two? You want to battle now?" Ashstar taunted.

Russetstar turned around. "I won't take my chances," She snarled and walked away.

"We need to get back to camp, now," Ashstar told his daughter.

Jaywing followed him, Thornclaw and Bumblestripe behind her. She felt like she was being watched. *I hope nothing* is *watching me*.

Chapter 17

Stoneheart walked along the ShadowClan border, the smell of the salty pines spreading on his tongue. He was with a border patrol: Blossomfall, Graystripe, and Dovepaw.

"Dovepaw, remember that move I taught you," Graystripe told his apprentice. "It will be helpful," He told her.

"Graystripe, I can see ShadowClan's camp! Something's tearing trees down though! I can hear ShadowClan cats talking and they don't know that it's happening!" Dovepaw meowed.

"Wow Dovepaw, what a mind you have!" Graystripe meowed.

"No! Look!" Dovepaw meowed.

Graystripe ignored her and continued on.

Dovepaw growled in annoyance. "Don't you understand? ShadowClan's camp is about to be torn up!" She hissed in Graystripe's face. "Do you want ShadowClan cats to die?"

Graystripe leaned forward. "Look, Dovepaw, I don't have time for your games. Plus, tonight is the gathering, perhaps we won't see a torn up ShadowClan-"

"No!" Dovepaw cut him off. "Look! Strain your eyes through those trees! Do you see that big yellow monster coming towards them?" Dovepaw asked. "We need to help them!"

Graystripe swiped a paw at her ear. "Dovepaw, have some sense," He meowed before walking away.

Stoneheart took a glance at Dovepaw. "Why don't you believe her?" He asked Graystripe.

"Listen to the elders' tales of how yellow monsters tore up trees in the old forest, but that was *only* in the old forest. Twolegs would never tear up this forest," Graystripe meowed.

"But-" Dovepaw mewed. She sighed and dipped her head.

"Wait," Stoneheart meowed. "Can I stay back with Dovepaw for a moment?"

"Yeah," Graystripe muttered.

As soon as Graystripe left, Stoneheart leaned down towards Dovepaw. "What do you see?" He asked.

"A yellow thing barging through ShadowClan's territory. It's coming towards their camp!" She then sprang threw the air and landed across the ShadowClan border. She turned around and stared at him. "Come on! Don't you care about ShadowClan at all?" She prompted.

"Dovepaw, I believe you. But ShadowClan are our rivals. We don't help rivals," Stoneheart meowed.

"How would you feel if they didn't help us?" Dovepaw growled.

Stoneheart looked at her, then swept his tail across the ground. "Look Dovepaw-" But before he could finish, Dovepaw raced off.

Stoneheart scrabbled over the ShadowClan border. "Wait Dovepaw!" He yowled. "Wait!!"

He ran through the ShadowClan forest, trying to keep Dovepaw in his sight. "Dovepaw!" He leaped through the air and landed in front of Dovepaw, stopping her. His paws skidded hard on the rough forest floor.

"Dovepaw!" Stoneheart shouted. "Do you have any idea what you're trying to do?"

"Yes!" Dovepaw cried. "I want to save ShadowClan!" She tried to throw herself over Stoneheart, but his paw slapped against her belly and she hit the ground.

Stoneheart pinned the small apprentice down with his paw. "Dovepaw, you don't understand. We could've gotten hurt!"

"But," Dovepaw sighed.

Stoneheart looked at her. Waves of her sadness and fear were hitting Stoneheart hard. "Dovepaw, lets just walk there to give them a warning," He meowed to her.

Dovepaw brightened up. "Ok!" She meowed.

But before they could move, shrieks ripped through the air, and the sound of crashing hit Stoneheart's ears.

"Oh no!" Dovepaw cried.

Stoneheart ran ahead of her. "Dovepaw, get help!" He called to her. "Tell them that ShadowClan needs help!" He raced towards ShadowClan camp and burst through the entrance. A large tree had crashed down into the middle of camp, and Tawnypelt stood beside it.

"I'm here to help!" Stoneheart meowed.

"Tigerpaw got killed by the tree!" Tawnypelt cried.

"Where are the others?" Stoneheart asked.

"Some have left, but Russetstar..." Tawnypelt's voice drifted off.

"What happened?" Stoneheart prompted.

"She lost a life," Tawnypelt meowed. "One of the monsters hit her and we can't find her!" She meowed.

"I'll find her!" Stoneheart raced off.

Dovepaw tore into camp and saw cats just staring at her.

"Dovepaw, why do you have to make such an entrance?" Ivypaw meowed.

"Stoneheart needs help!" Dovepaw meowed. "*We* need help! ShadowClan is being attacked by monsters!"

"Monsters?" Ashstar questioned as he came from his den. "I thought the twolegs wouldn't mess with the forest!"

"But they are now!" Dovepaw meowed. "We have to help them, it doesn't matter if they're rivals with us!" Dovepaw shot back at her leader. "Come quickly!"

"Dovepaw, what makes you think that we'd help fox-hearts like them? We might put our own lives in danger!" Thornclaw growled.

"No!" Dovepaw snapped. "Do...do.." Dovepaw couldn't catch her breath and all her words were caught in her throat. "You don't understand!" She snapped. "We might be rivals at the time, but that doesn't mean that you have to be cold-hearted and leave them to die!" She shouted. "That makes you just as bad as them!"

"Well," Ashstar sighed. "I guess you're right," He mewed.

"Then come on!" Dovepaw meowed.

"No, I mean you're right, but we won't help ShadowClan," Ashstar growled. "Not after all the trouble they've caused us," He turned and disappeared inside his den.

Dovepaw turned tail and raced toward ShadowClan territory. "I'm coming Stoneheart!" She mewled. She forced her legs to run faster, but they didn't seem to. Dovepaw hissed in annoyance. Then something yellow flashed across her vision.

"Russetstar!" Stoneheart called out. "Where are you?" He shouted. "Russetstar?"

He heard rustling and laughing in the bushes, and a russet-colored she-cat sprang out.

"H-hello Stoneheart. What are you doing here?"

Stoneheart stared at the battered she-cat. Her body was covered in blood and her claws were unsheathed. She had a smile on her face, and it showed bloody teeth.

"W-what happened to you?" Stoneheart gasped.

"Can you not tell?" Russetstar snapped. Blood trickled down into her eyes. "I was hit," She snarled. "Oh what pain I've been in, bleeding out one of my lives onto the grass and staining it with dark-red blood. What joy. I love seeing blood, even yours."

Stoneheart took a step back. "Russetstar, lets calm down now," He mewed.

"Calm down?" Russetstar growled. "You are my *rival*," She snarled. "And rivals fight, not run away like stupid cowards!" She twitched an ear.

"But, Tawnypelt wanted me to bring you back safely!" Stoneheart meowed.

"Shut it, loser. I got better things to do than argue with you all day," Russetstar snapped. "Now, lets fight!"

"Stop!" Tawnypelt sprang from the grasses. "Russetstar! Look at you!"

"What?" She snapped. "I know I'm covered in blood. But it's not *his*," Russetstar flicked her tail.

"Lets go!" Tawnypelt snapped to Russetstar. Tawnypelt padded into the shadows. Russetstar stopped at the edge of the shadows and looked back and Stoneheart. She glared at him. "When I see you again, I'll rip your throat out and bleach my borders with your blood. Maybe then Ashstar and his Clan of weak kittypets will see how tough I am."

Stoneheart's eyes locked with hers. "Russetstar, you can't just kill your rival," He then turned and headed back towards his own territory, but as he stumbled along the through shadowy forest, his eyes rested on a lifeless body.

Chapter 18

Stoneheart gasped in horror as he saw Dovepaw's broken and battered body. Her eyes were bulging and blood trickled down from her face. He bent down and bit back a yowl of grief.

"D-dovepaw?" He mewed. "Dovepaw are you ok?" He saw that her neck was twisted in some strange way. He shoved Dovepaw with his paws and rolled her over, only for more blood to trickle down her mouth.

"Dovepaw!" Stoneheart shouted at her. But no answer escaped from Dovepaw's mouth.

Stoneheart then picked her up by the scruff, and carried her lifeless body back to camp.

Stoneheart entered camp, and every cat rushed towards him.

"Dovepaw!" Ivypaw shouted. "Come on!" She cried as she crouched beside her dead sister. "Please wake up Dovepaw! Come on, use your paws," Ivypaw mewed. She nuzzled her muzzle underneath her sister's chin. "Dovepaw please!"

"Stop, Ivypaw," Whitewing meowed firmly, though there was a tone of sadness and grief in her voice. "There's nothing you can do, Dovepaw's dead."

Ivypaw tilted back her head and wailed in distress.

"I told you some cat would lose their life!" Thornclaw growled.

"Thornclaw, calm you fur down," Ashstar meowed. He stepped forward and padded towards Dovepaw's dead body and stared at her.

"Any cats who want to sit vigil tonight, come and gather around Dovepaw," Ashstar meowed.

Stoneheart stayed at Dovepaw's side. Ivypaw, Graystripe, Birchfall, Ferncloud, and Whitewing also joined him.

"Is that all the cats?" Ashstar meowed. "Because those are the cats who will gather around for Dovepaw at day. And then *every* other cat will sit vigil for Dovepaw at night," He turned and padded towards his den.

Stoneheart closed his eyes. *I'm sorry Dovepaw, if only I had stopped you from going, you would never of died*. Stoneheart looked at the setting sun. *Now Russetstar wants to tear my throat out*! *And when I found Russetstar, she looked battered just like Dovepaw*.

Stoneheart got up and padded towards Ashstar's den. "Ashstar," He meowed.

"Yes?" His father prompted.

"When I found Russetstar, she had been hit by a monster and was covered in blood," He began. "She acted crazy and said that we were rivals. She said that she wanted to fight me. She said that seeing my blood on her claws would make her feel happy," Stoneheart meowed. Before his father could reply, he continued. "But before we were about to leap at each other, Tawnypelt stopped us. As they were leaving, Russetstar told me that once she found me again, she'd tear out my throat and bleach my blood on the ShadowClan borders. She said that you and your Clan would be afraid then."

"She wants to kill you?" Ashstar hissed. "If she lays a claw on you, I'll rip her apart until she sees the stars!"

Stoneheart flicked his ears. "She's acting strange!" He meowed.

"I know how to deal with crazy cats," Ashstar meowed.

Before Stoneheart could reply, cats in the camp were hissing, and a strong ShadowClan scent wreathed around him.

Stoneheart turned around and sprang from Ashstar's den. He scrabbled down the tumble of rocks and stared at the ShadowClan leader.

Russetstar sat, her fur bristling. "Ashstar, Stoneheart, Jaywing, why don't you come here now and face me?" She hissed.

"Alright we will," Stoneheart heard Ashstar hiss.

The cats parted and made a path to Russetstar.

"What do you want this time?" Ashstar demanded as he sat down, right across from Russetstar.

Stoneheart sat down beside his father and then his sister, Jaywing, padded up to them and sat beside Stoneheart.

"ShadowClan is going to kill any cat that sets paw on our territory. And if we need help at one time, think again, because ShadowClan isn't weak!" She then turned and stalked off.

"That was all she had to say?" Ashstar hissed. He turned and stalked away.

"Stoneheart, lets get something to eat, I can hear your belly growling," Jaywing meowed.

Stoneheart padded to the fresh-kill pile with his sister. He picked a mouse and crouched down to eat it. As he chewed the mouse, he began to think. *It's my fault Dovepaw is dead. It's all my fault*.

Ashstar snapped open his eyes and found himself in a black void again. Not this again!

"Ashstar, you've done well. You killed Blackstar and now you just need to kill-"

"Would you get out of my head!" Ashstar screamed at Tigerstar.

"Oh really?" Tigerstar meowed. A pure black cat with red eyes lashed out at Ashstar and sliced his cheek. Ashstar felt blood ooze from the scratch. He lashed out with his claws and struck the shadowy cat's throat. It fell limp and faded into the shadows.

"Listen, if you want me out of your head, you have to kill Russetstar!" Tigerstar meowed.

"Why?" Ashstar meowed.

"Because I said so!" Tigerstar hissed. Glowing white claws lashed out at Ashstar's throat. He staggered backwards, blood trickling from his mouth. His blood spilled out onto his paws.

"Hmmm, lets see, how long can you stay alive?" Tigerstar prompted.

"With what?" Ashstar rasped. The effort to talk made him gag up more blood.

Shadowy cats spilled from the shadows, their red eyes hungry for blood.

Ashstar leaped into the air as two of the cats darted for him. Their heads crashed together, and Ashstar's claw sunk deep into their shoulders as he landed. Ashstar leaped off of them and sprang into the shadows. As the shadow cats neared, he lashed out and was able to strike the throats of one of them.

"Give it you best!" Tigerstar yowled. "Don't stop fighting!"

Ashstar felt his vision begin to cloud, and he couldn't see. His breathing became more rasped. Sharp claws jabbed into his throat.

Ashstar growled and tried to push the cat off of him.

"Ashstar, stop trying, you don't think Russetstar will let go, will you? She won't stop tearing into your throat until you die!"

Ashstar then kicked the cat off of him. He lashed out and felt his

claws tear at flesh. He hated how the hot blood leaped on his gray face to stain his fur.

"Ashstar keep your eyes open!" Tigerstar yowled out.

Ashstar flicked open his eyes more, but when he did, he saw ThunderClan camp. The ground was stained with blood, and the dead bodies of his Clanmates were scattered across camp. But one cat stood over the dead body of Cinderheart.

"St-stoneheart?" Ashstar mewed. He lashed his tail.

Stoneheart turned around, his mouth drooling blood and his face battered. "Are you proud of me?" He asked.

Ashstar took a step back. "Why are they all dead?" He cried. "This-" He cut himself off as he stared blankly at the dead body of Jaywing. "Jaywing!" He cried.

"I thought you wanted this," Stoneheart rasped. "To see every cat dead."

"I didn't want it like this!" Ashstar meowed. "Why did you do this?" He cried. He felt rage building up inside him. The only power he had left was in his paws. Ashstar couldn't control it. He lashed out at Stoneheart's throat, and his son fell to the ground dead.

Ashstar blinked. Hatred had drove him crazy. "No," He whispered. "What have I done?" Ashstar whisper to himself. "I've gone insane..."

"See, Ashstar, this is how it happens. Think of what you would have done if it was Russetstar," Tigerstar's voice rung in his ears.

"Please let me leave," Ashstar meowed. "Please. I need to get out of this blood soaked place!"

"Ok, fine," Tigerstar meowed.

Ashstar slumped to the ground, blood pooling from his throat. He closed his eyes and covered his face with his paws. I need to get away from Tigerstar.

Chapter 19

Thornclaw crouched at the edge of Ashstar's den. His eyes were narrowed as he watched the entrance. His ear snapped back as he heard rustling in Ashstar's den. The golden tabby warrior got up and walked towards his leader. He saw the moss scattered everywhere and Ashstar was stretched out on the ground.

"Ashstar?" Thornclaw prompted. "You ok?"

Ashstar scrabbled to his paws. Half his body was in the shadows, and his dark blue eyes were dull with pain and fear.

"Ashstar, are you ok?" Thornclaw repeated.

Ashstar turned towards him. "Y-yes," Ashstar rasped.

"Are you sure?" Thornclaw asked. "Because your moss bed is scattered everywhere. You've ripped it to shreds," He sighed.

"What? Oh me? I'm fine and I'm sure!" Ashstar meowed. "But Thornclaw, why are your paws covered in blood?"

Thornclaw looked down at his paws but strangely found no blood bleaching his paws. "What do you mean?"

"Never mind!" Ashstar hissed. "I guess I'm seeing things!"

Thornclaw padded closer to Ashstar. "Is this something dealing with Tigerstar or something?"

Ashstar perked up his head. "No! Well yes. He wants me to kill Russetstar, and this whole bloody-vision thing might stop. No. *Will* stop," Ashstar mumbled.

Thornclaw turned around and flicked his tail on the gray leader's nose. "Maybe eating something might help you better. Or maybe patrolling or walking around a bit. Or maybe seeing you family might make you happy," He meowed. He walked out of the den. "I'm about to order some patrols together, do you want to join one?"

"No. Nothing will help stop this blood from going away. Only killing Russetstar will," Thornclaw watched as Ashstar scrambled to his paws and walked out of the den.

Thornclaw sighed. *He shouldn't trust Tigerstar. The evil cat is only getting into his head.*

Ashstar walked through ThunderClan territory. He walked until he had made it to the ShadowClan border. Ashstar pricked his ears toward the ShadowClan land, and felt as if some cat was watching him. He curled his tail neatly around his paws.

"Ashstar?"

Ashstar jumped and felt his fur bristle as he heard some cat meow his name. He turned around and saw Jaywing.

"Jaywing! What are you doing here?" Ashstar demanded.

"I was about to ask you the same," Jaywing sighed. She padded closer to her father. "Why do you stare into ShadowClan territory like that?"

Ashstar sighed. He knew that he had to tell her. He turned to her, and looked into her blue eyes.

"Jaywing...." He mewed. "I've been training with Tigerstar. He won't leave my dreams, and the only way he will, is if I kill Russetstar, or at least take one of her lives," He meowed.

Jaywing stared at her father in shock. "That's terrible!" She mewed.

"I know. And sometimes I have dreams of blood," He flicked back his ear as he heard the rustling of leaves. "Stay behind me," He meowed to Jaywing.

A snarl erupted from the bushes and the ShadowClan leader stepped out. A smirk plastered her face and she clenched her teeth. She casually walked over the ShadowClan border and stepped onto ThunderClan land.

Ashstar felt a growl rising in his throat as Russetstar pressed her muzzle into his face.

"Well Ashstar," Her nasty breath billowed in his face. Ashstar unsheathed his claws and pushed her away.

"You should go," He turned to Jaywing.

"I'll stay," His daughter told him firmly.

"So I get to have fun with both of you!" Russetstar mewed. "How wonderful it would be for you blood to spatter the ShadowClan border. I'd be satisfied if you two died."

Ashstar crouched, his claws unsheathed.

"Don't try attacking me, you'll only die," Russetstar growled. "Then I can use you blood after it's spilled."

"Oh we'll see whos blood is gonna get spilled!" Ashstar hissed. He sprang at her, his claws extended and his paws outstretched. But instead on clawing that stupid smirk off her face, Russetstar dodged to one side, and Ashstar hit the ground. He struggled to get to his paws. Then he felt sharp claws rake his hindquarters. He felt blood trickle down his leg.

Ashstar snarled in annoyance. He quickly got to his paws and blindly lashed out at Russetstar. He felt his claws tear into her fur.

"Try and hit me, Ashstar!" Russetstar meowed. She ran around him, and Ashstar felt her claws rake down his sides and through his pelt.

Ashstar heard Jaywing gasp. "Ashstar!"

He lashed his tail, then lashed out his paw with full force. His paw hit Russetstar, and the russet colored she-cat fell hard on the ground. Ashstar sprang on top of Russetstar; he pinned her down, a

paw to her throat, and started slashing at her belly. Blood gushed over his paws and splattered his face, but he kept slashing, kept ignoring Russetstar's screams of pain.

Ashstar's limbs began to grow tired. He slashed at her one last time, then struck a blow to her throat before springing off of her.

Russetstar lay on the ground, her breath coming in short gasps. Her blood spilled out onto the grass as she struggled to breathe. Her mouth trickled blood and she twitched her paws and legs.

Ashstar walked over to her, put his paw on her throat, and thrust his muzzle into her face. "Do you give up?"

Russetstar gasped, ad coughed up more blood. "N-no. There's no way I'll surrender to you!" She rasped.

Ashstar sunk his claws into her throat, earning a weak moan.

"P-please don't kill me!" Russetstar rasped.

"And if I let you live, are you sure you won't try to kill me again?" He hissed to her.

Russetstar flattened her ears. "Do you think I won't try?"

Ashstar sunk his claws deeper into her throat until he could see blood flow from the wound.

A voice screamed at him in his head. It was Tigerstar's voice. *Kill her! Kill her! Rip out her throat*!

Ashstar let go of her, and watched as she struggled to her paws.

You fool! Kill her now! Tigerstar screamed at his mind.

Chapter 20

Jaywing walked along the side of the lake, her paws splashing in the water. She could still remember the scene: Blood spilling from Russetstar as her one of her lives ebbed away, and her screeches of pain as they cut off. Why did Ashstar do that? Why did he kill her?

"Jaywing? You ok?" Cinderheart appeared beside her. "You look pretty dull."

"I'm fine," Jaywing lied to her mother. *I can't tell her what I saw, and what I didn't stop*.

"Oh, ok," Cinderheart sighed. "You've been acting strange around your father. Is everything ok?"

"Ashstar's fine. I'm fine. I just wanna be alone for some time," Jaywing snapped. She lashed her tail. Jaywing sat down as she heard her mother's paw steps fade away. She looked out over the lake. The setting sun glittered down on the surface of the water, turning it golden. The waves of the lake lapped at her paws. She closed her eyes, thinking peacefully to herself.

"Jaywing?"

Jaywing jumped as she heard some cat call her name. She stiffened as she saw her father. His whiskers twitched.

"Look, I'm sorry," Ashstar meowed. He padded over to her, resting his tail-tip on her shoulder. "I'm sorry you were there. I'm sorry you

had to see that."

Jaywing turned away from his blue gaze. She flattened her ears. "'Sorry' doesn't cut it," She retorted. She slowly blinked and turned towards him.

"Jaywing. As your father and leader, I'm telling you that I'm sorry," Ashstar mewed.

Jaywing felt her neck fur rise. "Just....just leave me alone!" She hissed. Then she realized that she'd yelled at her father. "Sorry," She muttered.

Ashstar blinked.

"I just don't know why I'm supporting Russetstar. She deserved to die, since she threatened to kill us. But, you didn't have to kill her!" Jaywing growled.

Ashstar didn't flinch, he just held her gaze, then stood over her. "I had to kill her!" He snapped. "Did you want her to come back and kill us all?" He growled. "Is that what you want? To die?"

Jaywing stood up, bristling. "You didn't have to though!" She cried. "You just get insane every time you kill a cat!" She unsheathed her claws, tail lashing.

"Jaywing," Ashstar clenched his teeth.

Jaywing relaxed. *There's something he isn't telling me*. She sighed. "There's something you aren't telling me."

Ashstar lashed his tail. "Forget it. If I try to talk to you, you just never understand. Never," He turned away from her, then padded up the lake shore.

Jaywing ran in front of him, blocking his path. "I will understand!"

Ashstar lashed his tail. "Tigerstar took control of me," He told her firmly. He shoved Jaywing out of the way.

Jaywing staggered back and fell, rolling along the lake shore. She

landed roughly at the water's edge, feeling the cold water lap at her paws and belly and tail. Jaywing felt her blood turn icy cold. *Ashstar's gone insane*.

Jaywing snapped open her eyes, glad to be in the warriors' den. She lifted her head and yawned.

Jaywing stepped from the warriors' den, wincing as the sun burned her eyes. She crouched down to stretch. Most of the warriors had gone out to do patrols.

"Hey Jaywing!" Bumblestripe sprang towards her.

Jaywing blinked in surprise.

"Aren't you gonna return a greeting?" Bumblestripe asked.

"Hi Bumblestripe," Jaywing mewed, her ears feeling hot.

Bumblestripe leaned close to her. "Wanna hunt with me?" He asked.

"No but thanks for the offer!" Jaywing mewed. She ran towards Thornclaw, eager to join a patrol.

"Hey Thornclaw!" Jaywing greeted. "Do you have a patrol that I could join in?" She asked.

"Yes. Actually, you're leading this border patrol. Take Stoneheart and Graystripe with you," Thornclaw told her.

Jaywing dipped her head, then she padded off.

Ashstar curled up in his nest, thinking to himself. *I didn't mean to push Jaywing, I guess I was just mad*. He lifted his head, peering out of the den. The air was heavy with the smell of rain and dew, and dark clouds were beginning to push through the sky. The sun was just rising, making the storm clouds glow.

Ashstar sighed and rested his chin back on his paws. He closed his eyes and also hoped that his dreams wouldn't be filled with blood and claws.

Ashstar snapped open his eyes, relived to find himself in a peaceful place. Stars glittered in the night sky above his head, and starlight shimmered around him.

"Welcome to StarClan, Ashstar," A voice behind him greeted.

Ashstar whipped around. His eyes widened and he gasped as he saw the gray mottled tabby she-cat. Her green eyes sparkled, and she padded closer.

"Brindleface!" Ashstar mewed. He looked at his mother, his tail high in the air.

"Ashstar," Brindleface began. "Look over there," She flicked her tail to where four cats were sitting; a dip in the earth where starlight danced on the low grass.

Ashstar padded to the edge of the hill, looking at the four cats more clearly. There was a large brown tabby tom that was talking with the other three cats. *That looks that Brambleclaw*. A black-she cat with shining green eyes was huddled close to a gray tabby tom with blind blue eyes. *That's Hollyleaf and Jayfeather*! Ashstar then focused on a large golden tabby tom, his pelt shimmering with golden starlight, and his golden eyes raking the cats. *And that's Lionblaze*!

"That's correct," Brindleface's sweet voice echoed behind him. "Ashstar, we don't like for cats to be enemies in StarClan, so why don't you go and talk to them?"

Ashstar growled. "What? Why? Those cats don't deserve to be friends with me!" He hissed. "They-"

"Ashstar," Brindleface interrupted. "You can't be mad at them. They didn't have any choice but to be born, and that happened. And what have they done to you? Now go to them and make friends!" She yelled.

Ashstar flattened his ears and stalked towards the cats. When he was close enough, he rose from the glittering grass and padded towards the cats.

Hollyleaf turned her head, her ears flat, and her fur bristling. "Well

look who it is!" She hissed.

Ashstar lashed his tail and sat down. "Tell me everything you want to," He growled.

Lionblaze stepped forward. "Ashstar? Why are here when you hate us?"

Jayfeather padded beside his brother. "And why did you kill us?"

Ashstar flexed his claws. *They aren't supposed to be that way*! "Look, I just wanna make up for the things I've done!"

"Make up?" Hollyleaf growled. "Like we'd ever listen to that fox-dung!" She swung her head around and snorted.

Brambleclaw padded up. "Listen up you three," He mewed. "Why don't we just listen to Ashstar? After all, it's not his fault he killed us; he was being controlled by Tigerstar. And now, look what he has: A great daughter and son, and a caring mate. And plus, he's gained trust from his Clanmates!"

Lionblaze leaned forward.

"No, no, it's fine," Ashstar growled through clenched teeth. "I'll be on my way," He turned and ran through the grass. He came into a clearing and saw Brindleface sitting beside a pool of water. Starlight glittered peacefully around her.

"Brindleface, I'm-"

"Ashstar, there's a prophecy that you must hear," Brindleface interrupted. "*On the darkest night, the shadows will attack*."

All of a sudden, shadows flooded over Ashstar's vision like a black wave. He was swept through shadows and heard the distant yowls of cats. Then he opened his eyes, finding himself in his own den. He remembered Brindleface's words: *On the darkest night, the shadows will attack*.

Ashstar sat up in his mossy bedding, curling his tail over his paws. *What could that mean*? He then thought of ShadowClan. *Well, they*

could be part of 'the shadows will attack'. He then thought of the Dark forest, and Russetstar. There could be a great trouble coming along.

Chapter 21

"What?! Expecting another litter of kits?" Jaywing gasped. "Do you know how many?" She asked.

"No," Ashstar meowed. "But maybe this time, we'll have something more than dull colored cats!" He meowed.

Jaywing blinked. "Ashstar," She sighed.

"What?" Her father leaned down.

"I'm expecting Bumblestripe's kits," She sighed.

Ashstar bristled. "You're young though!" He hissed. "Well, I guess it doesn't hurt to have more cats in ThunderClan."

"Yeah," Jaywing agreed. "But....I'm just gonna tell you that they'll be born...." She hesitated. "Tomorrow."

Ashstar padded down towards the lake, looking out across it. The setting sun shone down on the lake, making it glitter with yellow and red. He blinked as he realized that it looked like something was walking *on* the water. Ashstar stood up. *What? Cats walking on water*?

The cat stepped closer, and Ashstar saw starlight glittering around its paws. It finally reached him. "Ashstar, terrible times are ahead."

Ashstar blinked slowly, and the cat was gone. *Why am I having these weird visions*? He padded back up the slope, wanting to get back to camp.

Jaywing worked her way through the crowd of cats. She finally took her place in a clear spot. Hawkpaw, who had just been made an apprentice the last moon, sat beside her. The brown tabby apprentice held his head high, his amber eyes shining. Although he was Millie's kit, he was still the kit of Graystripe, and that made him half ThunderClan and half kittypet.

A full moon was shining in the sky, and a bit of clouds were quickly crossing the bright moon.

Finally, Russetstar's voice rang out over the clearing. "We shall begin the meeting!" Shee looked at Ashstar, and nodded towards the ThunderClan leader.

Jaywing watched as her father stepped forward on the branch of the Great Oak.

"Prey is running well," He cast a smug glance at all the Clan leaders. "We've made three new apprentices. Hawkpaw, Bramblepaw, and Rowanpaw," Ashstar meowed.

"Hawkpaw! Bramblepaw! Rowanpaw!" The cats meowed.

Jaywing saw Hawkpaw lick his chest fur in embarrassment.

Ashstar then nodded to Onestar.

"The prey is running well," Onestar meowed.

Jaywing almost thought he was lying. The WindClan leader looked hungry and weak, and his ribs were showing.

"Wait!" A voice erupted from the cats.

Every cat's gaze landed on Tawnypelt.

The ShadowClan she-cat rose to her paws. "I've decided to leave ShadowClan and come to ThunderClan," She padded up the Great Oak, looking up at Ashstar. "You'll let me join your Clan, won't you?"

Ashstar looked down at Tawnypelt. "You aren't gonna be a spy or anything? Because I don't want spies in my Clan!" He turned to Russetstar. "Did you know about this?"

"No!" Russetstar hissed. "Tawnypelt, I thought you'd stay in our Clan! I never thought that you'd go and join that bossy excuse of a Clan over there!"

Growls came from the ThunderClan cats.

"Please let me join your Clan!" Tawnypelt begged Ashstar.

Her son, Tigerpaw, glared at his mother, lashing his tail.

Tigerpaw doesn't look so nice, Jaywing thought.

Ashstar sighed. "Alright then, you can join us," He meowed.

"Thanks!" Tawnypelt meowed.

Jaywing wondered why Tawnypelt wanted to join ThunderClan, but she was half ThunderClan anyway.

Then, Mistystar stepped forward, ignoring the other leaders. "The prey is running well for us."

Finally, Russetstar was able to call out. "This gathering is at an end!" She hissed. She leaped down from the Great Oak. "Come on! Lets go!" She hissed.

Her deputy, Crowfrost, glared at Tawnypelt as the ShadowClan cats left.

"Lets go," Ashstar meowed to ThunderClan. He glared at Russetstar's group as he led the ThunderClan cats across the tree-bridge.

Jaywing awoke in her nest. She stood to her paws, realizing that

Ashstar had called a Clan meeting. She stumbled towards the group of gathering cats.

"Foxpaw, Icepaw, step forward!" Ashstar called.

Jaywing heard Foxpaw mutter as he walked by. "It was about time!"

Jaywing felt tired with sleep as Ashstar gave the ceremony for the apprentices. The last thing she heard was their names.

"Foxleap! Icecloud!" The Clan called out.

Foxleap and Icecloud held their heads high.

Ashstar then walked down the rocky slope, and made his way towards his daughter. "Jaywing, you look very tired. What's the matter?" He asked.

Jaywing looked at her father and heaved a sigh. She looked down at her round belly swollen with kits.

"Oh," Ashstar meowed. "Where's Bumblestripe?" He asked. "He'd love to see your kits!"

"No," Jaywing meowed. "We got into an argument last night. Now Bumblestripe hates me. He said he wasn't going to take care of our kits. So now my kits will up *without* a father," Jaywing sighed.

Hate and anger lit up in Ashstar's eyes. Then it faded. "I'll try and find him," He meowed. "Stay there."

"But-" Jaywing protested.

"No, you need to rest in the medicine den, your kits are about to be born," Ashstar meowed. "And as your father and leader, I'm telling you that you need to rest !" He turned away and bounded off.

Jaywing walked into the medicine den, only to find it empty. She saw Cinderheart in the back of the den. She turned around. "Hi Jaywing! I was expecting that you'd be here. Brightheart and Alderpaw have gone to the Moonpool," Cinderheart meowed. "They wanted me to make sure that you took a rest."

As Jaywing buried in her moss nest to rest, she felt a bursting pain inside of her. She felt her heart ache, like something wasn't right. When she closed her eyes, she saw blood and gray fur cloud her vision.

Chapter 22 allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader: Ashstar

Deputy: Thornclaw- apprentice, Rowanpaw

Medicine cats: Brightheart- apprentice, Alderpaw

Warriors:

Graystripe- apprentice, Mosspaw

Squirrelflight

Birchfall

Ferncloud- apprentice, Ivypaw

Whitewing

Hazeltail

Sorreltail

Berrynose

Millie

Tawnypelt

Briarlight- apprentice, Bramblepaw

Blossomfall- apprentice, Rosepaw

Stoneheart- apprentice, Hawkpaw

Foxleap

Icecloud

Apprentices:

Alderpaw

Ivypaw

Toadpaw

Rosepaw

Mosspaw

Hawkpaw

Rowanpaw

Bramblepaw

Queens:

Daisy

Cinderheart- Mother to Ashstar's kits: Bunnykit, Softkit, and Wolfkit

Jaywing- Mother to Bumblestripe's kits: Sootkit and Mothkit

Kits:

Bunnykit- Brown tom with a white belly

Softkit- White and gray she-cat

Wolfkit- Fluffy dark gray tom with strange amber eyes

Sootkit- Pretty silver tabby she-cat

Mothkit- White and golden she-cat

Elders:

Longtail

Poppyfrost

Purdy

Chapter 22

Jaywing watched as her two kits played together, her eyes filled with love. She wished that Bumblestripe could see them, but for a strange reason, the tom had went hunting, and had never come back. Jaywing got to her paws. Back in the corner of the nursery was her mother. Her kits were quietly suckling.

Jaywing looked down at Sootkit and Mothkit.

"I got you!" Mothkit mewed.

"No! Try and catch me again!" Sootkit mewed. The two kits tumbled over in a tangle of fur and paws.

"Sootkit, Mothkit," Jaywing interrupted.

Her two kits sat up quickly, looking their mother in the eyes. "Are we in trouble?" They asked.

Jaywing blinked and looked out of the den. "I've got to go do something. And don't do anything bad while I am," She meowed. She remembered when she had gone to the fresh-kill pile, and her two sneaky kits had played around in the medicine den, messing up a few herbs. And after that, they were forced to help clean up.

Her kits were a half-moon old. And since her kits had been born, Bumblestipe had gone missing. Jaywing padded out of camp, her

tail swiftly brushing the leaves. It was very close to leaf-fall.

Jaywing halted as she smelled the mixed scents of Ashstar and Bumblestripe. They were very stale, but Jaywing followed the scents anyway. She came to a clearing. Then as she padded closer to a strange bush that looked out of place, she stopped dead in her tracks. The strong scent of death and blood choked her throat, and came around her in a foggy cloud.

Panicking, she rushed forward, bristling. She rushed her paw under the branches of the bush and touched the cold, limp body of something. She drug out the body, and gasped in horror. Jaywing remembered that feeling that she felt last moon. She remembered the vision of blood and gray fur.

She shook her mate's dead body. "Bumblestripe! Wake up!" She pleaded. But the gray tabby tom didn't move, didn't blink open his eyes. She turned him over and saw that his throat had been slashed, and maggots were already eating into him. Jaywing gasped and backed away in horror. She felt half anger and half happiness building up inside her. *He stopped caring about me, but he never stopped loving me.*

Jaywing padded into Ashstar's den. "Did you kill Bumblestripe?!"

Ashstar's eyes widened. "No!" He meowed. "I only went into the forest to talk to Bumblestripe. He said he wanted to hunt alone. Do you know who killed him? Was there ShadowClan scent?" He asked.

Jaywing hadn't thought about that. "I only picked up your scent and his!" She cried out.

Ashstar rose to his paws. "I'll go see if I find ShadowClan scent. And we'll know who to blame. Russetstar."

Jaywing padded out of his den and towards the nursery. Her two kits were playing with her mother's kit, Bunnykit. And the other two kits, Wolfkit and Softkit, were curled up by Cinderheart, sleeping.

"What's wrong, mother?" Mothkit asked as she got away from the

fighting kits.

"Something bad has happened," Jaywing meowed. "But I don't think I should tell you."

"But-" Mothkit protested.

Jaywing flicked her ears. Cats gasped in horror as Ashstar came through the camp entrance.

"What happened?"

"Why is Bumblestripe dead?"

"Who killed him?"

"Bumblestripe!!!"

Jaywing's two kits hid under her in terror. Cinderheart awoke in a sudden rush. "Oh no! What happened?" She mewed.

"ShadowClan happened!" Ashstar hissed. "Russetstar has killed Bumblestripe!"

Tawnypelt leaned forward to sniff Bumblestripe's dead body. "Wait!" She cried out. "He has Russetstar's scent and my son's scent!"

"You mean Tigerpaw?" Ashstar mewed.

"Tigerpaw... and every other ShadowClan cat is starting to act weird and evil. Russetstar is controlling them! They'll do anything she says!" Tawnypelt meowed. "That's why I left."

"What do you mean?" Ashstar prompted her.

"She's so fierce! She'll kill any cat that doesn't follow her rules. I guess when I left, I just got lucky!" Tawnypelt meowed.

Ashstar held his head down. "We'll grieve for him," He meowed. "But he has to be buried first. Otherwise we'll have no body to bury."

A moon had passed since Bumblestripe's death. *I can't believe my*

father died. And I never even knew him really. Mothkit sat up. *Well I wish I could just grow up already to get revenge. That's what I'll do! Russetstar will be my enemy*.

Mothkit walked back to her mother, and curled up to sleep. She had strange dreams. A silver tabby she-cat had come to her and said that she had a different destiny. And I don't know what that destiny it, Mothkit thought. But it doesn't seem like StarClan wants me on the path I want.

Chapter 23

"Bunnypaw! Softpaw! Wolfpaw! Ivypool!" The Clan cheered the cats' new names.

Ivypool held her head high.

Jaywing watched as her mother's kits bounced into the clearing with their new mentors. They then took off for a tour of the territory.

Ivypool headed for the fresh-kill pile.

Jaywing almost thought that Wolfpaw wouldn't become an apprentice. In the nursery, he had attacked his sister, Softpaw. Her ears had been torn. And she had to stay in the nursery for a few days.

Squirrelflight was mentoring Wolfpaw, and was keeping a very close eye on the apprentice. Something seemed strange about the gray tom. He acted strange and always glared at everyone. He always complained about everything.

Wolfpaw walked past her, giving her a glare.

Jaywing had had enough. "Wolfpaw!" She growled.

Wolfpaw turned, his eyes sparkling with interest.

"You shouldn't be glaring at cats like that!" Jaywing hissed.

Wolfpaw still had a smug look on his face. "Since when did warriors ever respect apprentices?" He asked. He lashed his tail, clenching his teeth. "I've always wanted peace, but it seems that none of these cats have it."

Jaywing couldn't believe her ears. She glared at Wolfpaw, and

opened her mouth to reply to him. But no words escaped her mouth. She was glad when her mother came over.

"Wolfpaw!" She hissed. Cinderheart flattened her ears. "Don't talk to my daughter like that!"

Wolfpaw looked at Jaywing. "Why should I respect her if she doesn't respect me?" He challenged. "And I'm your kit too. I'm your son!"

Cinderheart sighed. "I'm not gonna deal with this!" She hissed. She stalked away.

Before Jaywing could speak again, Wolfpaw walked off. *Rude apprentice..*

"Jaywing? Why is Wolfpaw so mean? When I'm an apprentice, I'm gonna stay away from him!" Mothkit mewed. She curled up beside Sootkit. Her sister dozed peacefully.

"No need to worry," Jaywing meowed. "His attitude will soon get taken care of," She licked Mothkit's head. "You're only five moons old," She meowed.

"And in one more moon, I'll be in that apprentice den with him!" Mothkit complained.

Jaywing sighed. "Go play with Sootkit for a while. I'll be back," She turned from the nursery. Outside, she saw Wolfpaw arguing with Purdy. *He'll learn that he's doing everything wrong one day*. She looked at the warriors' den. Birchfall and Hazeltail were quietly talking. Millie and Graystripe were gathered around Thornclaw, who was organizing patrols.

Jaywing walked out of camp. As she headed toward the lake, she saw the shadows of cats by the lake. *Maybe it's a ThunderClan patrol*. Jaywing crouched and crept closer. She parted her jaws and tasted their scent, it bathed on her tongue. *Rogues*! There were five cats. A huge black tom with a splash of white on his back was talking to the cats. There was a small brown tabby she cat with a torn ear. A white tom with silver stripes sat by the black tom. Two tall golden

she-cats sat beside each other, their ears pricked forward.

Jaywing bristled and stalked forward. "What are you doing on ThunderClan land?" She hissed.

The cats turned to her. The huge black tom stepped forward.

"Your land?" The black tom sneered. "Oh, I didn't know," He laughed.

"But you're on our land!" Jaywing hissed.

The golden tabby she-cat stepped forward. "Well now it's ours, so get lost," She snorted.

"And you're outnumbered too," The black tom meowed. "So get lost!"

Jaywing lashed out. Her sharp claws hit his muzzle. Blood spattered on the grass and oozed out of his sliced nose.

"Hey!" The black tom spat. He lashed out at Jaywing's ears.

Jaywing dodged his attack and fled up the hill.

"Follow her!" The voice of the black cat drifted to her ears.

Jaywing raced toward camp. *Well, they'll protect me! The rogues will be outnumbered there*! She jumped over roots and swerved tangled brambles. She could hear the beating of paws as the rogue cats raced after her. Her heart beat faster as she got closer to camp. Then, her paw got caught under an outstretched tree root. She landed face-first in a small muddy puddle. Jaywing scrambled to her paws, but it was to late.

A rogue cat jumped from the bushes and landed on her back. Jaywing felt sharp claws sink into her pelt. She hissed with burning pain and shook off her attacker. Before the golden tabby she-cat could scramble to her paws, Jaywing slithered under her belly to slice her belly open. But the she-cat struck out her paw and hooked her claws in Jaywing's belly fur. She felt her flesh rip open as the golden cat slid her across the ground.

Heaving for breath, Jaywing scrambled to her paws. She turned and raced for camp again. She could feel the breath of the she-cat on her tail. Blood continued to pool out of her belly, and Jaywing felt herself getting weaker. She started to slow down. *No! I won't die*! She forced her paws to run, but she slipped in her own blood and rolled into a thorn bush.

She heard the she-cat hiss as she too slipped in the blood.

Panicking, Jaywing got to her paws and sped away. Her vision was blacking, and her eyes were trying to close, but she forced them open. *I can't die*! Finally, she burst through the camp entrance and rolled on the ground. Blood pooled under her, and she heard gasps from her Clanmates.

The rogue cats spilled into camp. They stopped dead in their tracks, and looked around.

The black tom pushed his way to the front of his little group.

Ashstar raced over to his daughter's side. "Jaywing! Are you ok?" He asked.

Jaywing weakly shook her head. "It hurts..." She gasped out.

Ashstar glared at the rogue cats. His blue eyes blazed with hate.

Jaywing watched as her father glared at them. Blood trickled down her mouth, and her belly ebbed with a burning pain.

Her father lunged for the throat of the white tom. He sunk his claws in the cat's head, and beat him to the ground. His head quickly dipped down and his teeth tore into the throat of the white tom. The rogue cat writhed under his grip, then fell still.

Brightheart and Alderpaw rushed over to Jaywing, and brought her to the medicine den. Her wounds burned, and the last thing she heard was the black cat yowling.

"Well, looks like you killed Snow. Why can't we greet in a nice way? My name is Crow."

Chapter 24

"We've come to take your territory!" Crow meowed. "But we know how *precious* this land is to you," The black cat waved his tail in Ashstar's face.

The tall golden tabby she-cat stepped forward. "And there's more of us!" She meowed. "So you can say goodbye to your territory!"

Crow nodded. "That's Honey," He explained.

Ashstar thrust his muzzle in Crow's face. "Get out of here before I rip off your pelt and hang it in the forest!" He hissed.

Crow smirked. "Rip off my pelt? How would you do that? Take your claws and pluck out every hair on my pelt?"

Ashstar glared at him and lashed his tail. "Shut up before I rip your throat out!"

"Rip out my throat?" Crow snarled. "I'd like to see you try. Even Honey beat that stupid gray she-cat that said this territory was yours. That stupid gray cat was so weak, to bad Honey didn't kill her," Crow sneered.

"You call my daughter stupid one more time, I dare you!" Ashstar hissed.

The small tabby she-cat stepped forward proudly. "The stupid she-cat could barely defend herself," She hissed.

Ashstar immediately turned on her. He sunk his claws into her shoulders and heaved her back.

"Don't let him pin you, Hawk!" Crow yowled.

Ashstar realized that his Clanmates were gathering around to watch.

Thornclaw pushed his way to the front of the group. "Ashstar! Don't fight her!" The deputy hissed.

Ashstar ignored him.

"Hawk, you're my deputy, you'll do good," Crow meowed.

"Wait!" A voice cried.

Wolfpaw burst from the crowd of cats. He scrambled over to Ashstar and Hawk.

"What do you want?" Ashstar hissed.

"Please! Let me fight! I want to fight Hawk! And then I can prove to all of you!" Wolfpaw meowed.

"Well, young cat, this is a death battle," Crow meowed.

Hawk's ears pricked. "A death battle?"

"Lets go then!" Wolfpaw hissed. He leaped on Hawk and pinned her down. His claws slashed at her eyes.

Ashstar wondered where the rude gray apprentice had learned such cruel moves.

Hawk lashed out at Wolfpaw, but he dodged her blow and sunk his claws into her belly. He shoved her to the side, and she rolled away. Hawk scrambled to her paws, backing up towards Crow.

"Go and fight, weak kittypet!" Crow growled. He unsheathed his claws and sunk them into Hawk's pelt. He shoved her so hard that she tumbled over her paws and fell on her back. Stomach exposed, Wolfpaw lifted his paws. He swung them down on her exposed belly. Hawk let out a painful screech.

Hawk then lashed out and hit his chest. Blood spattered on her face. With Wolfpaw being stunned, Hawk slithered under his grip and got

to her paws. She lunged forward and sunk her teeth into his scruff. She hauled him into the air and threw him. Wolfpaw scrambled to his paws, but then staggered and fell, blood pooling around him.

Hawk ran towards him, about to give him the killing blow.

Wolfpaw then exploded from the ground. He jumped into the air and landed on Hawk, sinking his teeth into the back of her neck. Hawk wiggled under his grip. Then, with a cut-off wail, she fell still.

Wolfpaw got off of her. He looked around, blood staining his claws and muzzle.

"Hey, you're a pretty good fighter," Crow meowed to Wolfpaw.

Ashstar's heart jumped into his throat. *This won't go well...*

"Do you want to join our group?" Crow asked. "You'd be well," He meowed.

Wolfpaw hesitated.

Ashstar's heart twisted as he wondered what the apprentice would say. *He can't say yes! Or maybe he should...*

"No!" Wolfpaw hissed. "Your stupid group seems weak. Maybe you should leave!" He hissed.

"We'll be back," Crow meowed. "We'll create a Clan stronger than anything, and it doesn't allow weakness. Our Clan will be the strongest, and we'll come back and kill every one of you!" Crow hissed.

Wolfpaw's eyes flashed.

Ashstar looked at Wolfpaw, fear tugging at his claws.

"On second thought, I'll join you. I'll make your Clan stronger than these weak Clans. We can be called *ClawClan*. We'll be unstoppable," Wolfpaw meowed to Crow.

"Wolfpaw!" Cinderheart raced forward. "You can't leave!" She cried.

Ashstar stepped forward, and saw as Softpaw and Bunnypaw stepped forward. "Wolfpaw..." He whispered.

Wolfpaw turned to glare at his brother and sister and mother and father. "I'll leave if I want to. You never loved me anyway," He turned and stalked away with the rogue cats.

The clearing was splashed with blood, and the bodies of the dead rogue cats.

Ashstar climbed to the top of the great rock. "Poppyfrost! Purdy! Longtail!" He called. "Take the dead bodies of those rogue cats and burry them in the forest."

Longtail looked confused. "Why should we burry cats we don't even know?" He asked.

Ashstar glared at him. "Do you want to attract foxes in camp?" He hissed.

Longtail sighed and the rest of the elders followed him.

Ashstar padded into his den. His paws slipped on the moss and he fell onto the moss. He curled his tail over his paws. Sleep made his eyes drag down, and blackness covered his vision. *Oh Wolfpaw....why did you leave your own father...*

Ashstar woke on a hill. The grass was gray beneath his paws, and it rippled limply in the wind. Fog was all around him, but he saw the tiniest trace of red farther into the fog. Ashstar padded towards the glowing red. A cloud of blood touched his nose, stinging his throat and making him cough. Ashstar flexed his claws. *What is this supposed to mean*?

He then heard exhausted noises coming from farther down the slope. He also heard the running of a stream. Ashstar slowly padded down the gray slope, trying to see through the thick, white fog. *I don't like this place,* he thought. He heard the agonized moans of a cat as he padded closer, and the quiet stream was running slower. The scent of death was thick now, and the blood smelled so strong,

Ashstar thought he could taste it on his tongue.

Quiet laughs were coming from the stream, and the fog was parting away. Now, Ashstar could see a gray cat hunched over. His fur was ruffled. He then turned, his amber gaze rested on Ashstar, then he quickly turned. *Did he see me*? Ashstar twitched his ears. *That's Wolfpaw*!

Ashstar ran forward, but an invisible wall blocked him. Ashstar stalked along the wall, trying to see what his son was hunched over. His heart stopped. Softpaw's body lay in the stream, and now the blue water was turning red. Her head was twisted, and her dull blue eyes were starring right at Ashstar. Blood trickled from a large gash in his throat, and Ashstar realized that her throat had been ripped out.

"Softpaw..." Ashstar breathed out.

Wolfpaw's mouth dipped blood, and his claws flexed. "This is how powerful I am," The gray tom moaned. "I killed my sister."

"Wolfpaw!" Ashstar called out. Wind rattled everywhere. The fog was starting to roll in again.

Wolfpaw raised his paw to his throat, his claws unsheathed. "Why did I kill my sister? I guess I thought I was to good."

"Wolfpaw! No!" Ashstar cried out. The fog covered Wolfpaw now. Ashstar clawed desperately at the invisible wall in front of him. "Wolfpaw!" Ashstar yowled. "No!" He cried out. Shadows swallowed his vision, and the last thing he heard was Wolfpaw's screech cutting off. He's dead.

Chapter 25

It had been two days since Ashstar's dream. And since Wolfpaw left. The rogues were becoming stronger. They had attacked a border patrol last night. Thornclaw was badly injured, since he was leading the patrol.

Brightheart came in the den. "There's a gash in Thornclaw's shoulder. It's really infected. I think he must of fallen in dirt or mud," She meowed. She dipped her head. "He might not live through."

Ashstar got to his paws. "What?! Let me see!" He hissed. He raced to the medicine den. Thornclaw lay on his side. His eyes were closed. His shoulder was patched with cobwebs.

Alderpaw was laying beside Thornclaw, his paw held to his shoulder. "It's swelling and feels hot," He meowed when he noticed Ashstar come in. "I don't think he'll make it."

"Thornclaw will make it! He's a strong warrior!" Ashstar meowed. "Thornclaw, I know you can fight off that infection!" He meowed.

Thornclaw weakly lifted his head. "It burns..." He moaned.

Alderpaw got up. "I'll get you some herbs," He meowed. He looked back at Ashstar. "He's your deputy. You need to get him some wet moss and fresh-kill," Alderpaw meowed to Ashstar.

Before Ashstar could turn, Brightheart appeared beside him.

"I'll do it," She meowed. She turned from the den, her tail flicking.

Ashstar turned from the den and headed for the nursery. He spotted his daughter eating a mouse near Sootkit. She was trying to get her

to eat a piece of mouse. Mothkit was crouched in a corner. Ashstar flicked his tail to Jaywing, then walked over to Mothkit. He sat down and curled his tail around her.

"Hey Mothkit, why are you alone in this corner?" Ashstar asked.

Mothkit looked up at him. "I think I have a new destiny," She whispered.

"What do you mean?" Ashstar asked.

"I've played with my sister long enough," Mothkit meowed. "She always wins our play-fights. And Softpaw came over and did a practice hunt with us. I failed that," Mothkit sighed.

"Everyone makes mistakes," Ashstar meowed. "You'll try harder as an apprentice."

Mothkit didn't reply. Instead, she curled up for sleep.

Ashstar turned to Jaywing. "How old are they?"

Jaywing looked at him. "They're five moons old," She meowed. "One more moon and they'll be apprentices, too bad that they'll grow up without a father," She added sadly.

Brightheart appeared beside Ashstar. "It's half-moon tonight, and Alderpaw is supposed to be becoming a full medicine cat. And Thornclaw is in bad shape, so we'll stay in camp. It's dangerous anyway since the rogues are out," She meowed.

"I'll have a warrior to go with you," Ashstar meowed. "I know Thornclaw is strong, so he can go a few moments without you, I'm sure," Ashstar meowed to her. "Squirrelflight!" He called.

Squirrelflight padded up to him. "What?"

"Tonight is half-moon, and Alderpaw is becoming a full medicine cat," Ashstar began.

"That's great!" Squirrelflight cried.

"I need a warrior to go with them so they can travel safely," Ashstar meowed. "And that would be you," He meowed.

"I'll go with them," Squirrelfight's eyes sparkled brightly.

"Thank you," Ashstar meowed. He turned back to Brightheart. "I guess I'll have to be making the patrols for now on," He meowed. He went over to the warriors' den.

"Birchfall," Ashstar meowed. "Lead a patrol and take Graystripe, Mosspaw, Ferncloud, and Ivypool. Check the ShadowClan border," He meowed.

Birchfall twitched his whiskers. "Ok," He meowed. "I'll go."

"Whitewing, take Thornclaw's apprentice, Rowanpaw, out training," Ashstar meowed. As she and the golden tabby tom left the den, Ashstar turned to Stoneheart and Blossomfall. "You two, take your apprentices out training as well," He meowed.

Hazeltail and Berrynose padded up to Ashstar. "Can we lead a hunting patrol? The fresh-kill pile in kind of empty," Berrynose meowed.

"Take Millie with you," Ashstar meowed.

The three cats walked out of camp.

Ashstar's paws felt tired. It was already sunset, and he had worked harder than before. At least none of the patrols had gotten attacked by the rogues.

"No!" A scream came from the medicine den.

As if Ashstar had all the energy in the world, he bolted from his den and shot towards the medicine den. Thornclaw was coughing wildly in his nest. His eyes were dull.

"Thornclaw has gotten sick!" Brightheart meowed. "His fever is worse now, and so is the infection!" She cried. "We've ran out of herbs to give him, and with leaf-bare coming, there's no catmint near the twoleg den!" She meowed.

"I'll organize a patrol to go to WindClan and see if Onestar will let us have some," Ashstar meowed. He raced to the warriors' den. The warriors' den was empty, except for it having Ivypool and Birchfall in it.

"Where is everybody?" Ashstar hissed.

"You sent everybody on patrol, remember?" Birchfall lifted his head. "But Foxleap's patrol hasn't returned," He meowed.

Ivypool twitched her ears. "Foxleap, Hawkpaw, and Icecloud were in it. I think they went training," She meowed.

Ashstar's tail lashed. "I must be stupid to send everyone out. It's almost might and nobody is in camp. Come with me, we're going in the forest to bring every patrol I sent out," He meowed. He turned from the den and headed to the entrance. As they were in the forest, the last rays of sunlight were beginning to die away; night was coming.

"Is Thornclaw better?" Birchfall asked.

"No, he's worse. His fever is worse. His infection is worse. And the worse part is that Brightheart has run out of catmint. She doesn't think Thornclaw will live. But Thornclaw is strong, I know he can make it through!" Ashstar meowed.

"Not everyone lives forever," Ivypool meowed sadly.

A yowl of pain ripped through the air.

"Oh no!" Birchfall meowed. "It must be one of the patrols!" He raced ahead of Ashstar.

Ashstar ran with his patrol. They jumped over a fallen tree and came to a clearing spot in the forest. Ashstar pointed with his muzzle. "This way!" He turned left pushed through the thorn bushes, no matter if the thorns raked his pelt.

A ginger-red body flew into the bushes.

Ashstar saw the rogues. They barely had scratches on them.

Wolfpaw was among the rogues. He looked different than before. His pelt was ruffled and he had a scar across his mouth. His ear was torn and bleeding. His eyes flashed with delight.

Ashstar saw Crow, the rogue leader, pinning down Icecloud. Wolfpaw turned to Hawkpaw, and the two apprentices went rolling on the ground; a snarling mess.

A rogue that Ashstar had never seen before was padding towards the bushes where Foxleap had landed. Her coat was a golden honey color.

"Stop!" Ashstar growled. Birchfall and Ivypool padded beside him.

Crow left Icecloud in a pool of her blood. He came to stand in the front of his group. The honey-colored she-cat stood beside him. Wolfpaw untangled himself from Hawkpaw, and pushed the brown tabby apprentice to where Icecloud lay.

The sky was beginning to get dark, and a chilly breeze blew Ashstar's fur the wrong way. A very light rain was starting to pour down. Ashstar could hear thunder in the distance. A storm was coming. And it was coming in fast.

"Leave," Ashstar finally broke the silence. "Leave or else I have no choice but to kill you right here. Right now," He growled.

The rain started to beat down harder. Mud puddles were beginning to form.

"Do it," Crow meowed to the honey-colored she-cat.

She stepped over to where Icecloud lay and picked her up.

Ashstar was confused. He saw the rogue haul Icecloud over to a mud puddle. A spark hit him. "What are you doing?" He asked. A gash was in Icecloud's throat.

"No!" Icecloud screamed.

The rogue then pushed her muzzle into the dirty water.

"Stop!" Ashstar screamed.

"Hold them back!" Crow meowed.

Rogues jumped from the bushes and held back Ashstar, Birchfall, and Ivypool.

"Stop!" Ivypool screamed.

"Don't stop, Honey!" Crow called to the golden rogue she-cat.

Honey dug her claws into the back of Icecloud's head and pushed her muzzle down harder. Icecloud's screams bubbled up from the mud puddle.

Hawkpaw leaped up and darted to help Icecloud, but Wolfpaw broke from the group and held him down.

"Stop it now!" Birchfall screamed.

Icecloud's struggles got weaker.

Ashstar lashed out and hit one of the rogue cat's throats. He darted from the patrol and leaped on Honey. He clawed her back and sank his teeth into her scruff. With a grunt, he hauled her up and threw her in a patch of nettles. Her screams of terror echoed around the clearing.

Ashstar sank his teeth into Icecloud's scruff and hauled her out of the dirty water.

Crow looked around. He glared at Ashstar before turning and running away. The rest of his group followed. Even Wolfpaw.

"Icecloud!" Ivypool and Birchfall rushed forward.

Icecloud wasn't moving. Blood and muddy water drizzled from her mouth. Her fur was plastered to her skull. The gash in her throat looked swollen and dirty, and blood was spilling from it now. The muddy puddle was stained red, and the grass around it. The rain was pouring down very hard now, and thunder echoed across the sky.

Hawkpaw limped over to them. "Is she ok?" He asked.

"No. She's dead," Ashstar meowed. He got to his paws. "We need to hurry back to camp quickly before this storm gets any worse," He meowed. He hauled Icecloud's dead body up on his shoulder.

"Where's Foxleap?" Hawkpaw asked.

"I'm not sure. But there's no time to search. It's raining, it's cold, it's dark, and this storm is getting worse," Ashstar meowed.

Thunder cracked in the air. The rain was beating down harder.

"We've got to go! Come on!" Ashstar meowed. He started to run back to camp. Birchfall ran ahead with Ivypool.

Hawkpaw limped beside Ashstar.

Ashstar's pelt was soaking wet. He couldn't stop thinking about Wolfpaw. He's changed so much. I don't think he's my son anymore, Ashstar thought.

Chapter 26

Ashstar stayed up all night with Thornclaw. His fever was getting worse. Birchfall had picked up the fever too. And tomorrow would be the start of leaf-bare. He shuttered. It was already cold, and he could see his breath in the cold air.

"Ashstar, you need rest," Cinderheart and Brightheart came in the den.

After Icecloud's and Foxleap's death, the Clan seemed very alert. Prey was going scarce. Greencough was spreading. Hawkpaw had been badly wounded in the battle, but he managed to survive. He was off of apprentice duties.

Thornclaw's eyes were dull and glassy with fever. He rasped and coughed every second.

"I'll sleep in here," Ashstar meowed. He curled around Thornclaw, feeling his cold body. "I'll warm you up," He whispered to Thornclaw.

"Brightheart! Alderpaw!" A shriek erupted from the nursery. "Jaywing is sick!"

Ashstar raced from the den, feeling his heart skip a beat. He saw Jaywing coughing. Her kits looked terrified as they watched their mother cough roughly.

"This is terrible!" Brightheart meowed.

Ashstar just couldn't take it. He ran from camp, cutting through the thick forest.

He stopped at the twoleg place. He sat down, breathing heavily. *It's*

as if my world is crumbling. He then heard voices. He smelled rogue scent. Ashstar peered from behind the thick bushes. He spotted Wolfpaw, Crow, and Honey clustered together. At the far side of the clearing, he saw other rogues. A silver tabby she-cat, a black and gray tom, and a white tom.

It seemed as if the rogue leader, the deputy, and Wolfpaw were talking privately, as if they didn't want others to hear them.

"I can't believe we killed two ThunderClan warriors. We could've killed that annoying apprentice if my stupid father hadn't gotten in the way," Wolfpaw meowed.

Ashstar gasped.

Crow laughed. "We should take over ShadowClan now. And then the other two Clans, and then ThunderClan last," He meowed.

Honey shifted closer. "And we got away with taking their herbs," She laughed. "Wolfpaw, it's a good thing you told us that they get weak in Leaf-bare. So we should weaken the Clans. We should attack them during leaf-bare. "

Ashstar felt a growl rising in his throat. But he thought Wolfpaw would be kinder.

Wolfpaw pricked his ears. "I smell ThunderClan. "

Ashstar's paws tingled. *Maybe I should let myself be found. It's best to weaken them.*

"I'll check it out," Wolfpaw meowed.

Ashstar watched as he padded into the thick bushes. He crept back farther into the shadows.

Wolfpaw padded closer, clearly not able to see Ashstar.

Ashstar jumped on his son, pinning him to the ground. "Wolfpaw!" He hissed.

Wolfpaw gasped, then glared at his father.

"Stop being with these rogues!" He meowed. "You're gonna get yourself killed fighting us!" He meowed. "And I can't have you to die!" Ashstar looked at his son desperately.

"You don't own me any more. I'm not your son anymore. So stay away from me!" Wolfpaw hissed.

Ashstar felt his heart break. He unsheathed his claws and put his paw to Wolfpaw's ear. "Stay away from ThunderClan," He hissed. He wanted to tell Wolfpaw his dream. But Wolfpaw wouldn't listen. He took his other paw and held it to Wolfpaw's mouth. Then he took his claws and slashed Wolfpaw's ear. Wolfpaw tried to yowl, but Ashstar's paw silenced him. Ashstar jumped up and ran, feeling pain. His heart ached. *My son doesn't love me*. Anger swelled through him. *Well, then I'll treat him like a rogue*!

Thornclaw breathed heavily, trying to say something, but his words were only echoed gasps. He was to weak to even move. Ashstar shuttered. Everyone was getting sick, and leaf-bare had only began. Prey was scarce, the Clan was going hungry, cats were getting sick one by one. So far, Jaywing, Birchfall, and Squirrelflight were sick, along with the elder, Poppyfrost. He heard voices coming outside of the den. Ashstar crept forward, trying not to wake his daughter, Jaywing.

"This is a terrible start to leaf-bare," Brightheart was meowing.

Alderpaw sighed. "I think this is a clear sign that StarClan doesn't want us here anymore. With cats getting sick and hungry and with the rogues killing our cats, I think StarClan is telling us to leave," He meowed.

Ashstar's eyes widened. Is that what the apprentice really believed? *Maybe he's right. But I know we can handle a couple of rogues*.

"These rogues are vicious. They killed Icecloud and Foxleap in a very terrible way, and they wounded Thornclaw so bad, he's close to dying. I've had a vision from StarClan too. They showed me a place. A place beyond here. It has a huge space with no twolegs. Many trees are there. To me, it seems as if StarClan *wants* us to leave," Alderpaw meowed.

"We'll be going to the Moon Pool tonight. The others won't be there, of course, since it's not half-moon tonight. We need to get your ceremony finished," Brightheart meowed. "I think we should head out now."

"Take a warrior with you," Ashstar meowed.

Brightheart and Alderpaw turned around and jumped. "Did you hear us?" They asked.

"Yes," Ashstar admitted. "If you're starting to think we should leave, share with StarClan. They'll surely give you clearer signs if they want us to leave. But they brought us here. And we can survive leaf-bare. We can survive these rogues. But we have to prove our strength," Ashstar meowed. "I'll have Ferncloud *and* Whitewing to go with you," He meowed. "Go and get them."

"We were only going to go tonight," Brightheart meowed.

"And you will be going tonight," Ashstar meowed.

All of a sudden, a gasp sounded from inside the den, and a choking noise echoed in Ashstar's ears. His heart beat faster and harder. His worst fears came true. He took a deep breath and went into the medicine den, feeling his hopes break into a shattering darkness that choked him. He felt like he couldn't breathe.

Chapter 27

"Thornclaw!" Brightheart and Alderpaw cried.

Ashstar's mind went black. His best friend, his own deputy, was now dead, his fur cold, and his body stiff and limp with the scent of death. The last thing he ever wanted to see was Thornclaw dead. He thought the golden tabby would live to be the best leader in the forest. A proud leader. But that didn't happen. *And I knew it wouldn't happen.*

Cats gathered around outside the medicine den, gasping in shock as they knew the terrible news.

Ashstar pushed his nose in Jaywing's fur. "You have to let Jaywing live! I can't lose her to this stupid sickness!" He cried. "Not like Thornclaw did!" He meowed. His eyes were dull with pain and fear. "It's all Wolfpaw's fault! He's the one who took the catmint! If he wasn't alive, Thornclaw wouldn't be dead right now!" Ashstar cried out. His head tilted back, and he let out a cry of pain and anger. *That apprentice is going to be dead when I see him. I can kill my own son.*

Angry yowls rose from the cats.

"Kill Wolfpaw!"

"Kill the rogues!"

"Let's all go and attack the rogues!"

"Yeah! We'll show them not to mess with us!"

"Silence!" Ashstar yowled. He thrust his muzzle to the sky. *StarClan are punishing me, I'm pretty sure*.

Brightheart and Alderpaw thrust through the angry crowd of cats. "We're just going to go on ahead to the Moon Pool," Brightheart meowed. She bounded towards the entrance and walked out of camp.

Ashstar woke up to the sound of paw steps. Moon light shone dimly through his den. He got to his paws. He walked out of his den and peered over the ledge. In the dim light, he could make out the shadows of cats as the crept towards his den. Could It be Alderheart and Brightheart? No. They were in their dens either treating the sick or sleeping.

He heard quiet voices.

"Shhhh! Don't make to much noise, or he'll hear us!" A voice meowed.

"Are you sure this is Ashstar's den?" A voice asked. The voice sounded so familiar. It almost sounded like Crow's voice.

"Yep. This is Ashstar's den. Right up here. All we have to do is kill him. And then every cat will wake up confused and scared. Then they'll respect us as their new leader!" A voice sounded just like Wolfpaw.

"Hey!" Ashstar yelled. "Looks like you won't get that chance!" He leaped down. "ThunderClan!" He yowled.

Cats emerged sleepily from their dens, then they realized what was happening. Whitewing growled and stalked towards the cats. Ivypool hissed at the rogues.

"You may have won *just* now. But we'll be back. And we will kill *all* of you," Crow meowed. He lashed his tail.

"I'd like to see you try," Ashstar snorted.

The rogues padded out of camp.

Two moons had passed and no cat had heard anything about the rogues. Mothpaw and Sootpaw were apprentices, with Hazeltail being Mothpaw's mentor, and with Whitewing being Sootpaw's mentor. Sootpaw was progressing, though Mothpaw didn't seem so excited.

Rogue scent appeared on their territory in the passing moons, which meant that invasion was coming soon. Jaywing was doing better. She was cured of the sickness. However, Birchfall seemed only more worse. And Squirrelflight is starting to get better.

Thornclaw's death still depressed Ashstar, making him want to yowl in fear like a lost kit. He had picked his son, Stoneheart to be his deputy. Of course Jaywing didn't mind. She seemed to be happy and proud that her brother had made it to the deputy spot. The only bad thing was that leaf-bare was getting worse. It got colder each day. Prey was disappearing. Every cat was going hungry. Even Ashstar. But he was risking his life to save his own Clanmates.

A patrol all of a sudden raced through the entrance. They were covered in scratches. Berrynose stopped at a halt. "Ashstar!" He gasped. "The rogues! They are attacking ShadowClan!" He meowed.

Graystripe appeared beside him, Rowanpaw at his side. Since Thornclaw died, Rowanpaw was now Graystripe's apprentice.

"We tried to help ShadowClan, but we were outnumbered!" Graystripe called.

Ashstar flicked his tail. "Whitewing, Toadpaw, Rosepaw, Tawnypelt, and Blossomfall! Go with them to ShadowClan's camp!" He meowed.

They all raced off.

Ashstar hurried to the warriors den. "I'm afraid that the rogues might come over here and attack us!" He hissed. "Millie and Sorreltail, guard the entrance!" He called to the two she-cats.

"Briarlight, Hazeltail, and Bramblepaw, patrol along the ShadowClan border," He called to the three cats. "The rest of you, get prepared for an attack from the rogues!" He meowed. Apprentices were mostly in camp.

"Got it, Ashstar!" Mosspaw meowed. She lifted her head and tail proudly. Although she used to be a kittypet, she was strong and brave.

Maybe if she fights great in this battle, I can reward her, Ashstar thought. He raced to his den.

"Ashstar!" A patrol burst through the entrance of the camp.

Ashstar smelled the strong scent of blood. He leaped from the high-ledge and met up with the fighting patrol.

"What happened?" He asked.

"The...the.. rogues... they won and took ShadowClan's camp!" Graystripe was first to reply.

"What? How?" Ashstar gasped, shocked.

"Russetstar *let* them. She said that with rogues against her side, she'd be powerful. That's when they just turned us away. We saw Wolfpaw there. Wolfpaw and Honey killed all of ShadowClan's elders, saying that there was no room for weakness," Berrynose meowed.

"That's terrible," Ashstar meowed. His ears flicked. No cat was badly injured. *Of course Russetstar would want to be powerful. She wants to kill me. Me* and *all of ThunderClan*.

"I know this is a big risk but..." Ashstar began. "Tomorrow I will send a patrol to ShadowClan's camp. Sneak behind their camp without being seen, and spy on them. I must know what the rogues plan," Ashstar meowed.

"Ok," Berrynose breathed.

Ashstar heard him whisper, "I think this is the end of the Clans."

Although he heard what Berrynose said, he decided not to say anything about it.

"I hope the rogues don't come here next," Ashstar mumbled.

Jaywing crossed the clearing. "Ashstar," She meowed.

"What?" He looked down at his daughter.

"Mothpaw," Jaywing mumbled. "She's failed her first hunting session. And she can't get the hang of fighting," She meowed.

Ashstar looked at her. "Don't worry. She'll do better!" He meowed.

"But maybe her paws are set on a different path," Jaywing meowed. She blinked. "Maybe she's supposed to be a medicine cat," She meowed.

"We can't know that until we really are sure about it," Ashstar told his daughter. He looked up and saw his son, Bunnypaw, and his daughter, Softpaw, sitting near the fresh-kill pile. "Would you like to go eat?" He asked. "I'm pretty hungry myself."

"I guess I'll go eat," Jaywing meowed.

As they walked off, Ashstar felt right about Mothpaw. Maybe her paws are set on a different path, he thought as he watched Mothpaw tumble over her own paws during a hunters crouch practice a of corner of the camp.

Chapter 28

"Rosepaw, you will now be known as Rosepetal. Toadpaw, you will know be known as Toadstep. Mosspaw, you will now be known as Mossberry," Ashstar meowed.

"Rosepetal! Toadstep! Mossberry!" The Clan cheered.

"Now," Ashstar called out. "I would like a patrol of warriors to sneak behind ShadowClan's camp and spy for me. We must know what the rogues are planning," He meowed. "Rosepetal! Berrynose! Whitewing!" He called to the warriors. "You'll be going."

Rosepetal looked excited. This would be her first time acting out for her Clan as a warrior.

Ashstar looked over at Jaywing. Her eyes were clouded with sadness as she watched Mothpaw and Hazeltail head out for training.

The patrol for the spying quickly went out of camp. Ashstar was eager to hear information about the rogues. He needed to know their next attack.

Stoneheart came into his den. "Do you want me to organize patrols yet?" His son asked.

"No, not yet," Ashstar meowed. "Well, actually, send out a hunting patrol. Get them to catch as much prey as they can," He meowed. "Go on the patrol with them."

"Ok," Stoneheart meowed. He left the den, the brambles swishing behind him.

Ashstar sat in the shadows, silence falling over him. He flexed his

claws, thinking to himself. He got to his paws and padded from the den. The stone beneath his paws was cold and he shivered as a cold spike shot through him. The weak sunlight that shone overhead felt like nothing. The dull sky was cloudy, and Ashstar could smell rain. *I hope this storm won't be bad*.

A cold, light drizzle began to fall. The rain drops hit Ashstar's pelt, and it felt like hard, cold rain. Still, no news from the patrol. They hadn't returned yet. Ashstar hoped that they weren't going to spy very long. The hunting patrol had only just got back, having the best prey they could find in days. Ashstar didn't eat. He was letting his Clan eat first. He was risking his own life for his Clanmates.

"Ashstar, eat these traveling herbs," A voice behind him startled him.

He turned around and saw Alderheart. The brown tabby tom pushed a bundle of crunchy, leafy herbs towards him. "You haven't been eating, and no cat wants you to starve. Our leader needs to be strong so he can lead us through leaf-bare. So eat these, they'll build up your strength," Alderheart meowed.

"A nasty bit of herbs won't help," Ashstar grumbled. "I'll wait my turn of the fresh-kill pile," He meowed to the medicine cat.

Alderheart sighed. "Alright, I guess I can't get you to eat them," He meowed. "But I'll keep them here incase you decide to change your mind," He raced back to the medicine den.

Ashstar looked at the herbs. *I could eat them. And Alderheart is right. I should be a strong leader and lead my Clan through leaf-bare. But it doesn't hurt to starve*. He walked back to his den, his head drooped low. Ashstar curled up for sleep. But before his eyes could close, stars glittered around him. *Did I lose a life*? His head lifted in alert.

A silver tabby she-cat with green eyes looked at him. Stars swirled around her. She had a fat, juicy mouse in her jaws. She dipped down, and placed it on the ground. Then, she blinked at him, her eyes filled with love. Her starry form began to fade. The rain outside of the den got harder. It got colder. A cold wind swirled outside, and drifted into the den. Ashstar blinked and shivered.

Tired with hunger, he lashed out and hooked the mouse in his claws and tore into the mouse like a savage dog. He finished it in seconds, and already felt full.

Ashstar felt happy. A StarClan cat had come down to bring him food. Energy surged through him, and he didn't feel weak anymore. But he felt tired. He curled up for sleep. Blackness surrounded his vision.

Ashstar woke to the sound of hard rain and howling wind. He lifted his head sleepily, blinking his eyes to the dull light outside. His heart leaped with panic. A blizzard blew harshly outside. Ashstar flexed his claws. His whole body shivered with cold. He wanted to be warm. He padded out of his den into the hard driving wind. Cold seeped into his pelt. Hard snow drove into his face. He clenched his teeth.

Ashstar raced through the camp. He couldn't see anything but white. He couldn't hear anything but howling wind. He bumped into something sharp. His shoulder burned with pain. Ashstar realized that his shoulder got caught on a bramble thorn. It was also bleeding. Ashstar turned sideways, feeling his way along the wall. He tripped over a wire of bramble and fell into the entrance of a den. The warriors' den.

Graystripe gasped. "Ashstar! Did you really just go out in that blizzard?" He asked.

"Yes," Ashstar padded in the back of the den. Everything felt shaky. The bramble den shook in the hard wind. The branches creaked and rattled. Ashstar sat down, licking his wounded shoulder. Millie, Hazeltail, Mothpaw, Jaywing, Cinderheart, Mossberry, Stoneheart, Toadstep, and Briarlight were in the den. Graystripe also.

"We had just got back from our training session. But then the blizzard rolled in, and we went for cover," Hazeltail meowed, huddled close to Mothpaw. The golden and white apprentice was shivering.

"I'm so worried about the others, I have no idea if they're ok," Graystripe meowed.

"Has the patrol came back yet?" Ashstar asked.

They all shook their heads sadly.

"I hope they're ok," Ashstar meowed.

All of a sudden, the wind howled loudly, and the bramble den rattled crazily. Ashstar heard the yowls of the cats in the den. It felt as if the whole bramble den was being carried sideways by the strong wind. Ashstar felt his body move with it. He grasped Jaywing's pelt in his claws. He held his daughter to the ground, trying to protect her. Everything went black around him. His eyes closed weakly.

Chapter 29

Ashstar woke. He felt cold all over. Snow was piled all over the ground like a think piece of smooth moss. Ashstar lifted his head. Blood stained the snow strangely. Jaywing was beside him.

"Ashstar," She gasped. She blinked at her father.

The whole camp was destroyed. The warriors' den was torn apart, the brambles of it lying everywhere like a thorny trap.

Hazeltail's body was positioned weirdly. She was curled around Mothpaw.

Ashstar ran towards them, Jaywing at his side.

Hazeltail was dead.

"Hazeltail," Jaywing gasped.

Mothpaw moved. She lifted her head. She shot up and ran under Jaywing's legs, shaking wildly.

The bramble wall of camp was torn. Ashstar turned everywhere to view his surroundings. He saw Graystripe helping Millie get to her paws. Cinderheart and Stoneheart walked around, helping Briarlight. Mossberry and Toadstep went around camp, checking the other dens.

Ashstar looked at Jaywing. "I'm going to go check the apprentices' den," He meowed.

Jaywing shot up. "I'll go," She meowed. She looked at her daughter,

Mothpaw. "Mothpaw will come too," She meowed.

A day had passed since the blizzard. The Clan was weak and was having no hope at all of surviving this leaf-bare.

Ashstar still had hope though. A spark of hope was still staying alight in his mind. *Maybe we'll survive, but I don't know how much more of this I can take*. He sat down. *I hope it's all over soon*.

Paw steps sounded outside of his den.

Ashstar turned to see Jaywing and Stoneheart. Their eyes were gleaming with expectance.

"What?" Ashstar mumbled.

"Ashstar, we can't give up hope. We need you to lead us through what ever the condition is," Jaywing meowed.

"I know I need to be strong," He meowed. "But....," His voice tailed off. He couldn't think of anything to say. "Stoneheart, go and bring Brightheart and Alderheart to me."

Stoneheart raced out of the den.

Jaywing shifted her paws. "Anything you want me to do?" She asked him.

"Go to the warriors den and take a hunting patrol out. I know you aren't deputy, but this Clan needs to be fed," Ashstar meowed.

Jaywing hurried away from the den.

All of a sudden, a cold rush of air blew in Ashstar's den. His fur ruffled. His whiskers twitched.

All of a sudden, he blinked, and a faint figure shown in the shadows of the den.

Ashstar's eyes widened. Who was that?

Eyes gleamed in the shadows. They were amber colored.

"Hello?" Ashstar called out.

Nothing moved. Nothing responded.

The amber eyes disappeared, leaving Ashstar confused. His fur spiked as he felt something sharp touch his spine. He turned, claws unsheathed, but nothing was there. "Stop!" He growled.

Stoneheart, Alderheart, and Brightheart padded into the den. His son looked confused. "Who are you talking to, Ashstar? A ghost?" Stoneheart asked.

Brightheart swished her tail. "Why did you call us here?" She asked.

Alderheart shifted his paws.

"I need you to go to the Moonpool," Ashstar meowed.

All of a sudden, paw steps thundered outside.

With a flash of golden fur, Mothpaw tumbled into the den.

"Ashstar! Ashstar!" The apprentice screamed. "I slept and I had a dream for StarClan! I'm supposed to be a medicine cat, not a warrior!" She mewled. She stopped talking and sat down, panting.

"What?" Ashstar questioned.

"I'm destined to become a medicine cat!" Mothpaw mewed. "I had a dream."

"Good. Then you can come to the Moonpool with us, and then we'll see what StarClan says," Brightheart mewed to Mothpaw.

Ashstar woke up. He wasn't in his den though. His paws felt wet and it felt like a cold vine was wrapping around his paws. He opened his eyes, seeing darkness around him. He was standing in cold, dark water. It was strange here. It didn't feel right. Ashstar felt like he was being watched. But by who?

All of a sudden, he was knocked under the dirty water. Ashstar felt his paws get caught under a root in the water that swirled around

him.

Ashstar struggled to his paws. Now, he could see. There was a steep slope in front of him. Ashstar walked out of the black water and headed up the slope. When he reached the top, he gasped.

Below was ThunderClan camp. The ThunderClan cats below were huddled together as if they were cold. A chilly wind swirled around. Ashstar kept looking down.

All of a sudden, the rogue cats burst through camp. The charged into the cats, hissing. Claws flashed everywhere down in camp.

Ashstar gasped as a rogue cat headed for the nursery. No! He raced down the hill, claws unsheathed. He swung his claws at the rogue cat, but nothing happened. No blood splashed the ground.

The rogue cat tore into the nursery and swung its claws at Daisy's face. The claws caught her eye.

Ashstar heard her scream. More shrieks echoed around camp. He then saw Jaywing. His daughter let out a horrible scream that made his blood turn to Ice. Ashstar raced forward. "Jaywing, no!!!" He screamed. But it was too late. Jaywing dropped to the ground, dead, blood pooling around her and quickly drizzling from her throat.

"No...," Ashstar choked out.

Cinderheart appeared beside him. She couldn't see him there, since this was just a dream. She pushed her nose into Jaywing's fur. Then, a rogue leaped on her back, sinking its claws into her pelt.

Ashstar could only watch this terrible scene. He could only be forced to hear the screams of cats get cut off as they died. He felt like he couldn't move; like his body was made of stone.

After a few moments, the screams stopped. Every other noise faded into silence. The camp was covered in blood and the dead bodies of his Clanmates. Ashstar felt pain inside of him. He closed his eyes.

Ashstar woke up, breathing hard. He sat up, his heart quickening. It was just a dream. But it didn't feel right. Is StarClan trying to tell

me something?

Chapter 30 allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader: Ashstar

Deputy: Stoneheart

Medicine cats: Brightheart

Alderheart, apprentice: Mothpaw

Warriors:

Graystripe, apprentice: Rowanpaw

Squirrelflight

Cinderheart

Birchfall, apprentice: Softpaw

Ferncloud

Whitewing, apprentice: Sootpaw

Millie

Sorreltail, apprentice: Bunnypaw

Berrynose

Tawnypelt

Briarlight, apprentice: Bramblepaw

Blossomfall, apprentice: Hawkpaw

Ivypool

Mossheart

Toadstep

Rosepetal

Apprentices:

Mothpaw

Sootpaw

Bramblepaw

Hawkpaw

Rowanpaw

Softpaw

Bunnypaw

Queens:

Daisy

Elders:

Poppyfrost

Longtail

Chapter 30

Ashstar didn't get any sleep that night. He was backed up against the back wall of his den. It felt cold. A wind was carried by the breeze. It swept into the den, making it more cold.

Ashstar growled in annoyance. He sat up, rubbing his nose. *I guess I'll hunt*. He crept out of his den, his pelt getting a bit warm by the weak sunlight. Snow was still littered around the camp because of the blizzard. He padded to the camp entrance, feeling the sunlight die away. It was cool in the forest. The tall trees' shadows bathed his back, making coldness seep into his fur. He shivered. His own breath came out in little clouds.

Ashstar crept through the undergrowth, ears pricked. His belly growled. He stopped dead in his tracks. Tiny paw steps were coming from the left side. Ashstar turned slowly and crept out of the undergrowth. He peered from the rough bushes, scanning the forest. He spotted a mouse. It was under a tree, curled up and sleeping.

Ashstar crept forward. *Don't mess this up, Ashstar*! He crept closer. Then, he pounced on the mouse. He sunk his fangs into the mouse and killed it. But that wasn't all. Hunger clawed as his belly. His own hunger took control of him. Ashstar started to eat the mouse like a savage dog. He finally finished the last bit, licking his lips. His hunger faded. *No! What have I done*?

He looked down, disgusted to see nothing there but stained blood. Ashstar looked up the tree, hoping to find a squirrel nest. *I need to find something big and good for my Clan! I can repay them*! His heart leaped. But they'll never know. He froze. Paw steps were coming from behind him. Ashstar threw himself into the nearest bush. A thorn bush. The thorns pricked his pelt, making him want to screech. A long, sharp thorn pricked at his ear. He smelled blood and realized that a thorn had cut his ear, and now it was bleeding.

He made a small hole in the bush with his claws. He watched carefully with his eyes.

"We have tons of prey to bring them!" A strange voice mewed.

Ashstar felt delighted. A patrol would bring home tons of prey. He smelled the warm scent of the fresh prey. It made him hungry.

"If we give Ashstar the prey, we might get to join his Clan," A familiar voice touched Ashstar's ears.

Who are they? Ashstar bristled.

"Great idea, Wolfpaw."

Ashstar gasped. Crow's voice! His fur stood on end. The rogues were back, and they had a plan!

He backed away from the thorn bush and turned away, running. He had to get home.

Ashstar posted two guards at the camp entrance, waiting for the rogues to arrive. He lashed his tail with his back hunched over, his claws unsheathed, his eyes narrowed and his ears flat. He kept looking at the camp entrance, preparing himself.

"You again!" A cat hissed.

"Leave!"

Ashstar ran towards them. Cinderheart and Berrynose were hissing at the rogues. Ashstar pushed his way to the front of the crowd. The rogues were in a patrol. Crow was in the lead. Wolfpaw was beside him. Behind Wolfpaw was a sleek gray tabby she-cat. On Crow's left side was Honey. A brown tabby tom with scratched ears and yellow eyes stood behind her. And behind Crow was...

"Russetstar?" Ashstar gasped. The terrible stench of ShadowClan bathed his tongue. He unsheathed his claws.

"Yes, Ashstar, greetings," Russetstar meowed. "As you can see, we all brought you gifts!" She mewed.

Ashstar realized that all the rogues were carrying prey. Except Russetstar.

Russetstar stepped aside. She flicked her tails towards the dark brown tabby with yellow eyes. "This is Mud," She meowed. She flicked her tail to the sleek gray tabby she-cat. "And that's Mist."

Crow stepped forward. "ShadowClan has become much stronger with us fighting beside them. And the cats who tried to leave ShadowClan are in a better place now," He snarled.

Ashstar felt sick.

"Now, why don't you take our gifts? Wolfpaw said he wants to return to his home and family," She smiled at Ashstar.

She's lying! Ashstar thought.

"You look hungry," Russetstar mewed.

"No! Get out of here. For all we know, it could be poisoned or have something in it!" He snapped. He glanced back at Cinderheart and Berrynose. They seemed to nod in agreement.

"I don't care if my son stays out," Ashstar hissed. "It's his fault for leaving my Clan. And he's already murdered cats. He's betrayed his Clan. He doesn't deserve to come back," He growled.

Wolfpaw looked hurt. "I never wanted to join this stupid Clan anyway," He unsheathed his claws. "But if that's how you wanna be...," He nodded towards Mud. Mud leaped at Berrynose. Mist leaped on Cinderheart. Crow and Honey charged into Ashstar. The two of them then leaped off of him and charged into camp. Ashstar tried to get up, but a sharp set of claws held him down.

"Ashstar, why don't we see who is stronger?" Wolfpaw hissed.

Ashstar's eyes widened. "You know I'll win. I don't want to kill you!" He looked at Wolfpaw.

Wolfpaw lashed out and sliced Ashstar's nose. Blood leaped into the air.

Ashstar lashed out and knocked Wolfpaw onto his side. Alarm flashed in his son's eyes as Ashstar sunk his teeth into his scruff and hauled him into the air. Ashstar threw Wolfpaw's body into a tree. The hard thump echoed in Ashstar's ears. He ran over to Wolfpaw.

Wolfpaw wasn't moving.

Ashstar sheathed his claws.

Wolfpaw's body twitched. He lifted his head slowly. Then he scrabbled to his paws. Alarm flashed in his eyes. He then ran into the undergrowth, his paws spraying up dead leaves.

Ashstar turned to see Cinderheart struggling under Mist's grip. The rogue was about to sink her teeth in Cinderheart's throat. Ashstar raced forward to help his mate. His heart pounded. He leaped on Mist. He lashed out at her, hitting her muzzle and eyes.

Mist scrabbled free and pelted into camp.

Ashstar helped Cinderheart get to her paws. "Are you ok?" He asked her.

A scratch was on her muzzle. "Apart from this scratch, I'm fine," Cinderheart meowed. "I'll help Berrynose, you get into the camp!" She meowed. She raced over to Berrynose and Mud.

Ashstar pelted into camp, the wind blowing his fur. He spotted Jaywing. His heart leaped. Jaywing was struggling through the crowd of fighting cats, her two kits at her side. Jaywing looked tired. Ashstar raced over to her. "Jaywing!" He cried.

He reached his daughter. "Jaywing, I'll get Mothpaw and Sootpaw out of camp. You need to go to the medicine den," He said gently.

All of a sudden, a screech echoed around camp. Ashstar turned to see Stoneheart blocking Russetstar's path to Bunnypaw and Softpaw.

Out of nowhere, Wolfpaw burst into the camp. He lunged at Softpaw without warning. Softpaw's screech was cut off.

"No!!!" Ashstar screeched. He headed towards them.

"Attention!" Crow's voice boomed across the camp.

Every cat stopped fighting and looked at Crow.

The rogue leader cleared his throat and looked at Ashstar. "Ashstar, if you want Stoneheart and Bunnypaw to live, you have to hand over your territory," He meowed.

Ashstar gasped in shock.

ShadowClan warriors rushed in the camp at once. Two ShadowClan warriors that Ashstar didn't know sank their claws into his shoulders. They held him back from charging towards his two sons.

"So, would you rather let your two sons die because of territory, or would you rather let your two sons live and give us the territory?" Crow snarled.

Ashstar struggled in the two warriors' grips. "No!" He snarled. "I won't let you take it!" He cried.

"There's no use in struggling," Crow laughed. "You're badly outnumbered, Ashstar," He meowed.

Ashstar realized that he was right. ShadowClan warriors were pinning down ThunderClan warriors. The rogues sat around them.

"I told you that we'd come back. You shouldn't have taken our warning so lightly," Crow meowed. "Give up," He snarled.

Ashstar looked at Stoneheart. "Ashstar," He cried. "Let them take the territory!" He mewed.

Bunnypaw struggled in Wolfpaw's grip. "Please!" He cried.

Ashstar felt frozen. He didn't even know what to do. He wasn't going to let his two sons die. There just had to be another way.

"Please give us another chance!" Ashstar meowed. "I beg you! Don't kill them!" He meowed.

Crow's tail lashed. "There is no other way!" He snapped. "This is either life or death. For us, it's kill or be killed. But this is *your* chance. This is *your* choice," He smiled. "Now, what would you have?"

Ashstar's heart sank. "Take it. Take all of our territory," He cried. "Leave us alone and take it!" He screamed.

Crow smiled. He looked at Russetstar and Bunnypaw. "Let them go," He meowed.

Stoneheart and Bunnypaw ran over to Ashstar.

"Now, this territory is ours. You better leave," Crow meowed. "I want all of you out of here."

Chapter 31

Ashstar was at the head of his group. They were away from Clan territory. He never wanted to ask the other Clans for help. They might not listen anyways.

"Ashstar," Stoneheart turned to him. His right ear was bleeding. Rain was soaking his pelt. "We need to find somewhere to shelter from this cold rain."

"I know," He meowed. "I'm soaked."

Jaywing was beside him. And Millie was behind him.

All of a sudden, a lightning bolt flashed across the sky like a snake and hit a tree close to Ashstar's group. It sparked up in flames. The sound of thunder was loud. All of a sudden, more lightning flashed around Ashstar. A bolt hit a tree behind his group. Ashstar's heart pounded. Flames were hissing and crackling all around him.

Shrieks split the air.

Ashstar's cats scattered.

"Wait!" He called.

The tree in front of him cracked. It leaned over and fell, its branches shaking.

Millie, Jaywing, and Stoneheart were still crowded around him. But the rest of the group had scattered. "Run!" Ashstar called. He ran to the left. The flames from the fallen tree were slicing through the grass. They blocked Ashstar's path, standing high.

Another tree that was lit on fire cracked and fell onto the ground. Its flames crossed the grass towards him.

"Run! Faster!" Ashstar called to the group. Jaywing ran ahead of him. Then, the flames blocked their path. They were all closed in a tight, flaming circle.

"What are we going to do now?" Jaywing asked.

Ashstar flexed his claws, his ears twitching. "I'm not sure."

Millie stalked over to the crackling flames.

"Millie?" Ashstar growled. "Get back over here!"

Millie turned to him, the flames reflecting in her blue eyes. "The rain won't come down any harder," She meowed. The flames blew in the wind, hissing more.

"What do you mean?" Ashstar asked.

"To make up for everything I've done, i'm going to save you," Mille meowed.

"How?" Ashstar demanded.

Millie padded really close to the flames. She crouched.

"What are you doing?" Ashstar asked.

"Get on my back and hop over the flames," Millie meowed. "I know I won't make it. But I can save all three of you," She meowed.

Ashstar gasped. "No! Millie! You're going to get out no matter what!" He looked around for some escape.

"No. Let me do this," Millie meowed.

Jaywing padded to her. "Thanks for being my friend and mentor. You're a really nice cat. I'll miss you," She touched noses to Millie.

"Hurry!" Stoneheart yowled. "The flames are getting closer!"

Ashstar felt the heat of the flames against his pelt. Stoneheart was right.

"Tell Graystripe and my kits that I love them," Millie cried.

"I will," Jaywing mewed.

Jaywing crawled onto her back.

Millie clenched her teeth and almost slipped against the weight.

Jaywing then leaped over the flames.

Ashstar looked towards Stoneheart. He nodded at his son.

Stoneheart crawled onto Millie's back. He reared and leaped over the flames.

Ashstar was left. He crawled over to Millie and crouched. "Get on my back," He meowed. "You are going to live, Millie!" He hissed. He flexed his claws. "You only have one life, like a regular cat, but I'm a leader, and I have 6 lives left. Go on without me!" He cried.

"No!" Millie looked at him. "I'm going to save you," She meowed.

"But you'll die!" Ashstar hissed. "Let me save you! I'll come back alive and we'll still be ok!" He looked at her, sadness swamping over him.

The flames were getting closer.

"Come on!" Ashstar cried.

"I won't let you die!" Millie cried.

Teeth sank into Ashstar's scruff. He was hauled upward into the air. Millie threw him over the flames just in time. His soaked body hit the ground beside Stoneheart and Jaywing. He slipped on the wet ground. "Millie! No!" He cried.

He heard a terrified shriek get cut off as the flames crackled and hissed and grew larger.

"No!" Ashstar cried. "Millie!" He cried. He slumped on the ground. "Millie...."

Jaywing looked at him, sorrow filling her gaze. Stoneheart rested his tail along Ashstar's spine.

"It's all my fault she's dead! I'm such a terrible leader. If only I was the one who..." His voice trailed off.

Jaywing bristled. "Don't say that!" She growled. "Millie died to save us. She wanted to save you. She didn't want you to lose a life. She didn't want it to get wasted."

Ashstar turned on her. "My life wouldn't have been a waste if I saved her!" He hissed.

Lightning flashed across the clearing.

"I've lost everything. Wolfpaw and Softpaw. My territory. And now Millie and the rest of my Clan. What am I going to lose next?" He asked himself. He looked at his daughter and son. "You two?"

Jaywing shifted her paws.

The rain then got harder.

"We should find shelter," Stoneheart meowed.

"You two can go look for it," Ashstar hissed. "I'll stay and grieve over Millie."

He watched as his kits left him sitting in the hard rain. They disappeared over a hill.

Ashstar looked at the slightly big fire that was still burning and crackling. He lifted his head to the stars. "Millie, I hope you're up there," He mewed quietly. "I hope you're well and safe in StarClan," He mewed. "I hope you understand that I couldn't save you," He drooped his head in shame.

"Ashstar, it wasn't your fault," A soft voice mewed.

Ashstar lifted his head. He gasped. Millie stood in front of him. Her pelt was dull and translucent. Her outline was made of tiny stars. Her eyes were slightly a dull greenish white color.

"Millie?"

"I want to thank you for trusting me. I want to thank you for everything you've done for me. But I want you to know that my death wasn't your fault. I'll thank you for that after you know that. Tell everyone I love them. The shadows are claws with blood that will make you strays. The shadows are getting stronger," Her form began to fade.

"Wait!" Ashstar cried. "Millie, don't go! What does that mean? How and why must the shadows get stronger? Why are the shadows claws with blood that will make us strays?" He asked. "What does it mean? Please tell me!" He cried.

Her form fully faded.

Ashstar was left standing alone in the hard, cold rain.

Chapter 32

Ashstar woke up. He realized that he'd sat near the fire all night in the rain. It was still raining. He sat up, alerted. "Jaywing? Stoneheart?" He called. He started to walk over to the hill that he last saw them. The hill was steep. Ashstar tried to make his way down, but he tripped and started to roll. He unsheathed his claws and tried to hook them into the grass. He kept rolling over and over until he reached the bottom. He lay there for a moment, panting.

Ashstar got to his paws and put his nose to the ground, trying to pick up a faint scent of his kits. Nothing. *Did they leave me*?

"Stoneheart!" Ashstar called. "Jaywing!" He yowled. "Where are you?"

Ashstar sighed. He walked around, trying to look for his kits. The rain got harder and colder. Ashstar gasped. He saw a small carved cave with a rocky overhang. Could Jaywing and Stoneheart be nesting there?

He ran towards it. When he got to it, the rain immediately went away. He was protected by the rocky overhang. The rain got harder. Ashstar curled up. He closed his eyes.

Jaywing was curled up beside Stoneheart. She heard thunder. She jerked her head up. Ashstar was nowhere to be seen. She prodded Stoneheart in the side with her paw. "Stoneheart! Wake up!" She mewed.

"What?" Stoneheart lifted his head sleepily.

"Remember when we found this shelter and said that Ashstar would find his own way here?" She asked.

"Yeah. That was your idea," Stoneheart meowed. "What about it?"

"Well, Ashstar isn't here!" She mewed. She got to her paws. It was foggy outside. The rain was also getting harder. Jaywing could hear it.

"I'll go look for him!" Jaywing meowed.

"We should wait for the rain to stop," Stoneheart meowed. "I don't need you getting sick," He mewed.

"I don't care if I get sick. I want to find Ashstar!" She hissed at her brother. "If you want to stay here, that proves you really don't care!" She hissed. "Maybe you forgot that Ashstar gave up his territory for you," She meowed. "*He* gave up his territory for *you*. And maybe that was a waste," She meowed.

Hurt flashed across Stoneheart's eyes.

"Stoneheart, you owe Ashstar!" Jaywing meowed. "He saved your life," Jaywing meowed. She turned slowly and padded from the warm den.

"Jaywing, I...," Stoneheart began. "Jaywing I'm sorry," He meowed.

"'Sorry' doesn't help find Ashstar and it doesn't help get back territory!" Jaywing growled. She broke into a run. Her paws carried her towards an open field with no grass. She was out here, alone. Nobody to talk to. Nobody to walk with. She looked at sun. It was beginning to set over the steep hill that rose in the distance. She remembered that she and Stoneheart had come over that hill, looking for shelter.

Ashstar woke up. He felt cold. He shivered. The stone beneath him touched his claws. Coldness seared into his heart. Everything that happened was stuck in his mind. Millie's death.

"Help!" A small voice cried.

Ashstar gasped. That sounded like Mothpaw.

"Mothpaw? Is that you?" He called from the cave.

The hard rain from last night had eased into a light rain.

If there was a cat in his Clan right outside of this cave, he had to find them.

He ran from the cave. A small orange shape was standing on the hill.

"Hey!" Ashstar called.

After a moment, the orange shape came running towards him.

It was Mothpaw.

"Ashstar!" The medicine cat apprentice cried.

"Mothpaw!" Ashstar cried.

"Ashstar...Brightheart is...dead," Mothpaw mewed. "The rogues killed her. We went to get herbs. But then Crow told us no. Next, he slashed his claws across her throat! When I saw Brightheart lay still, and when her blood pooled all around her and around my paws, I knew that's when I should've ran!" She cried.

"Mothpaw," Ashstar breathed in her scent. His muzzle rested on her head. "There's nothing we can do about Brightheart's death. Right now, we need to get back to my shelter. There's a huge storm coming," He could taste the watery taste of rain on his tongue.

"Where's Jaywing?" Mothpaw asked. "I want to see my mother. Is she with you?" She asked.

"No. It's a long story," Ashstar meowed. "I'll tell you tonight," He meowed. "Do you know where anyone else is?" He asked.

"No," Mothpaw meowed. "I'm alone. I wouldn't of been alone if Brightheart hadn't of died," Her eyes were clouded with sadness.

"Come with me," Ashstar meowed. "We'll try and find Jaywing and Stoneheart in the morning," He meowed. His tail touched Mothpaw's spine. They started to walk to the shelter.

Jaywing trudged slowly through the thick undergrowth. She finally came to a clearing. She realized that she was on the hill that Millie died on. She ran up to the middle of the clearing. Maybe Ashstar had traveled downhill. She started to walk across the clearing. She knew this was a big, wide hill. And it was steep, too. She padded in silence. The sun was setting now. The light rain was turning hard. Storm clouds were rolling across the sky. Lightning flashed in the distance. The sun was sinking behind a rise in the distance.

Jaywing ran across the clearing. The slope took her off guard. She tripped in mid air and fell, rolling down the hill. Grass spattered in her mouth. She unsheathed her claws and tried to hook them into the slope. The rain was harder. She felt mud slide under her. She finally rolled to the end of the hill. She stood on her paws, shaking mud from her fur. She felt dizzy. Her fur was spiked like a hedgehog. The hard rain pelted down on her fur, washing the mud away.

By now, the sky was getting darker. Storm clouds chased each other across the sky, trying to hit each other with lightning. Jaywing's paws felt tired, and her mind whirled. She saw a rocky overhang with a cave carved under it. She felt like she couldn't run towards it. Tiredness tugged at her paws.

Jaywing neared and saw two shapes huddled together in the cave. The sky got darker. The rain got harder. Strong wind whirled around her. Cold rain slapped her face.

The two shapes were cats. One was a small golden cat. The other was big and gray.

Jaywing recognized them as she got closer. She took another step forward. That's when the weather swirled around her. The rain turned into snow. Cold wind swirled around her. Her soaked body became more cold. She shivered with cold and hunger. Her paws tingled. She got closer to the cave. She then broke out into a run. She darted towards them.

"Ashstar!" She called.

Chapter 33

A day had passed. The blizzard was still raging. Ashstar's stomach growled.

Jaywing's ears flicked forward. She curled her tail around her paws, her chest fur blowing in the wind. Mothpaw crouched beside her.

"Someone's got to hunt in this weather," Jaywing meowed, looking into the storm.

Ashstar blinked as snow landed on his nose.

"We can't just sit here waiting to starve," She meowed.

Ashstar turned to her, flexing his claws. "What? So I have to go? Do you think that there'll be prey in this weather? Everything could be dead or hiding!" He meowed. "And the rest of our Clan is out there. Lost and scared. And Stoneheart...he's probably out there, cold and scared. He doesn't have anyone to be with," Ashstar meowed. He looked into Jaywing's blue eyes. "I'm glad to see that you're safe," He got to his paws and padded from the tiny cave.

Ashstar trudged in the deep snow. He tripped over something. He looked back. It was a dead mouse. The creature was covered in snow. Ashstar picked it up in his jaws.

"Jaywing!" A voice cried.

Ashstar started to run towards the cry. He ran down the hill, the mouse still in his jaws. Ashstar tried to see through the snow. The blizzard was getting rough. Ashstar then saw a gray cat padding through the snow.

"Stoneheart?" He called.

The cat turned. Then he started to run towards Ashstar. "Ashstar!" He meowed.

Stoneheart rubbed his muzzle on Ashstar's cheek. "Ashstar.... is Jaywing ok?" He asked.

"Yes. I also found Mothpaw. But Brightheart was killed by the rogues," He meowed.

Stoneheart looked at his paws. Then he looked up at Ashstar.

"Lets go home," Ashstar meowed. He set the mouse on the ground. "Eat if you're hungry," He meowed.

"Thanks!" Stoneheart mewed. He crouched down to eat his mouse.

The wind howled around them. The snow got harder. It got colder.

Ashstar shivered. "I wish we were in ThunderClan," He murmured.

Stoneheart looked up.

"We could be together again. We could be warm inside out nests right now. Millie and Brightheart wouldn't be dead. If I had killed Wolfpaw when I knocked him out against the tree we wouldn't be out here! Softpaw wouldn't be dead!" He growled. "I should've killed Wolfpaw," He growled.

Stoneheart bristled. "Wolfpaw is your son. Stop saying you should kill him!" He meowed.

Ashstar flexed his claws. "Wolfpaw is evil. He killed Softpaw. He even tried to kill many more of us!" He growled. He lashed his tail and turned around. "I'm going to ThunderClan!" He hissed.

"No! You can't! They'll kill you!" Stoneheart cried.

"So? I have 6 lives left!" Ashstar growled. "I'm going to ThunderClan. I'll take on all of those rogues! And after that, I'll leave Wolfpaw wounded so badly. I'll slash his throat and watch as he bleeds to death right in front of me!" Ashstar laughed. He unsheathed his claws and sank them into the snow.

"Ashstar! Don't say that!" Stoneheart cried.

Ashstar was licking his long, sharp claws. "Wolfpaw should die," He mewed. He started to walk up the hill.

"Ashstar!" Stoneheart growled.

All of a sudden, a WindClan patrol appeared. A gray cat was in the lead.

Ashstar growled as the patrol turned and saw him. Wolfpaw stepped closer.

"I'll kill you!" Ashstar cried. He lunged for Wolfpaw. His claws slashed at his son's throat. He clamped his jaws around his throat and tore at his flesh. Blood leaped into the air and spattered Ashstar's face, staining it red. Blood dripped from his claws and whiskers. Ashstar tore into Wolfpaw's throat and tugged at it. He heard the cats around him screaming in terror.

"Stop!" A cat screeched.

Ashstar clamed his jaws shut around Wolfpaw's throat. He then felt it rip in his jaws. His tasted blood his in mouth. Then, he tore Wolfpaw's throat out. He spat it on the ground, blood staining the snow. The snow turned a dark red, almost black.

"No! You killed Owlfoot!" A cat screeched.

Ashstar felt sick as he looked at the dead cat. Dark blood spilled from his torn throat. It pooled around him. Ashstar backed away as a stream of sticky blood came close to his paws. That wasn't Wolfpaw he had killed. It was just an innocent WindClan warrior.

"Why did you kill him?" A pale she-cat asked.

"And why are you all the way out here?" A brown tabby tom asked.

Ashstar looked back at Stoneheart. The horrified look on his son's face made Ashstar feel terrible. Of course Stoneheart would look like that; Ashstar had just torn another cat's throat out!

Ashstar then ran up the hill, dashing to get away from them. "No!" He cried. "I can't believe what I just did! I won't believe! Maybe this was just a dream!" He kept running. Then he stopped. He realized that he had run such a long way. He had left Stoneheart behind. He was alone again in the blizzard. It was also night. Everything around him was dark. Snow was coming down harder. And it got colder.

Ashstar looked to the right. He saw a small shape crouched in the clearing.

"Hey!" He called.

The shape turned.

Ashstar realized it was a cat. Then it started running towards him.

Ashstar realized who it was. It was Bunnypaw. He started to run towards his son.

"Bunnypaw!" Ashstar cried. "I thought I'd never find you!" Ashstar meowed.

Bunnypaw snuggled into Ashstar's chest. "I can't believe I've found you!" He meowed. He backed away from Ashstar. He gasped. "Why is your mouth bloody?" He asked.

"I killed prey," Ashstar lied.

"In such a bloody way?" Bunnypaw asked.

"Well, I was hungry," Ashstar lied. "Do you have any idea where the rest of my Clan is?" He asked.

"Yes!" Bunnypaw mewed. "I'm sheltering with Sootpaw and Mossberry. Mothpaw and Brightheart were with us. But then they went to try take herbs from ThunderClan. They haven't returned in two days," He meowed sadly. "I was on this hill to look for more of our Clan. I ended up finding Birchfall and Ferncloud," Bunnypaw meowed.

Ashstar felt happy knowing that his sister was still alive. He then

felt sad. "We were trying to escape that fire. Millie died, and I said it was my fault. But she came from StarClan and told me it wasn't my fault she died. I lost sight of Jaywing and Stoneheart though. I found shelter and I found Mothpaw as well. She told me that Brightheart was killed by the rogues. But she never said anything about you," Ashstar meowed. "Then Jaywing found us. I left to go and look for Stoneheart. I found him but...," His voice trailed off. "At least I've found you!"

"At least Brightheart and Millie are with StarClan," Bunnypaw meowed. He looked up at Ashstar. "Come on, let me take you to our shelter!"

Author's note

Sorry I haven't been updating in a while. You know, I have school and all this other stuff over the week. And plus, my cat just died, and I'm really heart broken. Cali is her name. She was a very pretty calico cat, and she was very friendly. I'm very sad that she's gone now. She was like a family member to me. But now that she's gone, things won't be the same. But I would love to hear what you think about the story so far. I might get to chapter 35 and stop there, and I might make a book continuing this book. I might call it: Warriors: Ashfur's Revenge(book 2) Let me know what you think of it :)

Chapter 34

Ashstar woke up in the warm fox den. Bunnypaw and Sootpaw were crowded around him. Ferncloud and Birchfall were curled up together, while Mossberry was out looking for more cats. Stoneheart never showed up though. Maybe he had tried to look for Ashstar and had found Jaywing and Mothpaw.

The blizzard had calmed. A light snow was falling. Weak sunlight pooled in the fox den. Ashstar got to his paws and stretched.

Bunnypaw woke up, his ears twitching. "Morning, Ashstar!" He mewed.

Ashstar looked down at his son. His whiskers twitched. "I was gonna go and find Jaywing and Mothpaw, but now-" He looked down at his growling stomach. "I'm going to go hunt."

"I wanna come!" Bunnypaw mewed.

Ashstar was unsure about this. He looked outside. Then he looked back at Bunnypaw. "Ok. You can come."

"Thanks!" Bunnypaw dashed from the den.

Ashstar raced after him. They raced over the hill, their paws kicking up snow behind them. Then, Bunnypaw stopped to a dead halt.

Ashstar tripped over his paws and landed face-first in the snow. He stood up, shaking snow from his pelt. He looked crossly at his son.

Bunnypaw was staring over at the forest.

"Why did you have to stop?" Ashstar asked. He traced his son's gaze. "What are you looking at?"

"I hear shrieking," Bunnypaw mewed. "I can see cats fighting."

"How can you see and hear anything at all?" Ashstar asked. All he could see was the green of the trees and the blur of the brown trunks. It made him dizzy as he strained his ears to listen.

"I think the rogues and ShadowClan are fighting RiverClan!" Bunnypaw mewed. He looked at Ashstar with desperation. "Ashstar we have to go and help!" He meowed. "We have to!"

"What are you seeing?" Ashstar asked.

Bunnypaw was already racing down the slope. His paws kicked snow into Ashstar's face.

Ashstar pushed his paws harder. Then, he leaped, landing on Bunnypaw.

Bunnypaw wiggled under his grip. "Ashstar!" He cried.

"Bunnypaw, stop!" Ashstar growled.

"But..," Bunnypaw sighed.

"I can't see RiverClan from here. And plus, they're on the other side of the lake. It would be impossible to see or hear them," Ashstar meowed. "You're probably just imagining them."

A look of hurt flashed across his son's eyes. "You don't believe me?"

"Of course I don't," Ashstar meowed. He swept his tail along Bunnypaw's spine. "Now can we please enjoy this hunt? I'm starving!" He added. He left Bunnypaw sitting there like a startled rabbit.

Ashstar trudged up the snowy slope. He walked up and up until he reached the top. He turned around and looked down at Bunnypaw, who was still standing there, his back facing Ashstar.

"Bunnypaw! Come on!" Ashstar called.

His son turned to him, his eyes reflecting white snow, his gaze looking distant. "They're killing them."

Ashstar felt sick. Why was his son acting like this? Did he just want to get his father's attention? Who was killing who? What was he talking about?

"Bunnypaw, this isn't funny," Ashstar growled.

"I know it's not," Bunnypaw meowed firmly. "They're dying. StarClan won't like it if we stand here and do nothing to save them," He meowed. "We have to help."

Bunnypaw sounded so distant. He sounded so serious.

"Bunnypaw," Ashstar breathed. He padded down the slope. "What's going on?" He asked.

"We have to help them!" Bunnypaw screeched. He flattened his ears and looked at Ashstar, his eyes looking hollow, filled with pain and fear. "I'm going without you, then!"

Bunnypaw ran down the slope, his tail flicking behind him.

Ashstar followed, fur bristled, ears flat. The snow finally cut off. The trees stretched tall and loomed over Ashstar. The weak sunlight was cutting through the trees, destroying the shadows.

Ashstar panted, slowing down. He was surprised at how much energy Bunnypaw had. Ashstar forced his paws to keep running. His muscles screamed at him to stop running, but if slowed down now....

"Bunnypaw, slow down!" He called, his paws slipping on leaf mulch.

"I can't! They're in trouble!" Bunnypaw cried. He ran faster ahead.

"Bunnypaw, stop!" Ashstar called. His lungs screamed for air. Then, he slowed down, panting hard.

Bunnypaw was no more than a fast brown spot heading deeper into the trees.

Ashstar caught his breath. Then he started to run again. He had

more energy now. He was almost about to catch up to Bunnypaw.

Bunnypaw ran faster, though.

That cat is going to pass out if he doesn't stop, Ashstar thought. *He's pushing himself on.*

"Keep up!" Bunnypaw screeched.

"Slow down, the lake is ahead!" Ashstar screamed. They were heading for a small hill that then sloped down steeply. It was right at the lake's edge. And if Bunnypaw didn't slow down, he was going to plunge into the lake. And since he was tired, he wouldn't have any energy left to climb to the water's surface. And if that happened, he would drown. No, I won't let my son die! Not like this!

Ashstar clenched his teeth as he forced his paws to push on. He unsheathed his claws, gripping the small stones beneath his paws to push him forward. He couldn't shout a warning now. He couldn't waste his breath. He felt like he was drowning; he couldn't breathe. Ashstar pushed his paws harder. He got a boost of energy that sent him flying across the grass. He leaped over Bunnypaw and landed in front of him, sliding on the wet grass. His back paws felt nothing but air as he dangled helplessly at the water's edge. His claws tried to grip the wet earth, but the dirt was weak and crumbled under his weight.

He fell through the air, his fur waving in the cold wind. Then, his pelt hit icy cold water, and soon enough, he was already surrounded by darkness. The sun's golden rays melted away as he sank deeper into the water. He tried to swim upward, but his paws churned helplessly in the water. Ashstar tried to scream, but bubbles only escaped his jaws. He was tired with no energy left in his body. But the good thing was that he had saved Bunnypaw. But he was drowning in the process.

Ashstar let the water pull him deeper into its depths. His eyes closed as he felt the air draining from his lungs. Finally, darkness swept his vision as his cold body hit the bottom of the lake.

Chapter 35

Ashstar woke up, gasping for air. The grass around him was lit by stars. A pale gray she-cat stood in front of him, her green eyes glowing. A white and golden she-cat sat beside. A gray tabby she-cat stood beside her, her blue eyes reflecting the stars. A small white she-cat stood beside her, her green-blue eyes glowing with happiness.

"Softpaw?" Ashstar gasped as he saw his daughter.

No cat moved from the ranks of pale pelts.

A flame-colored tom pushed to the front, his green eyes reflecting the starry sky above.

Ashstar recognized Firestar, ThunderClan's past leader. But back then, Ashstar was so ambitious, he had killed Firestar to become leader of ThunderClan.

"Ashstar, you have just lost a life. Take some time to rest," Firestar meowed. He sat down, his tail curling around him paws.

Ashstar got to his paws, looking at all the she-cats behind Firestar. "Brindleface, Brightheart, Millie, Softpaw," He breathed out their names.

"You can't talk to them," Firestar meowed. "You need to rest. You can't waste your breathe," He meowed, blinking.

"If you're upset with me, that's why I can't talk!" Ashstar meowed. "I know I killed you in the past. But that was in the *past*. Can't you just get over that and forgive me?" Ashstar asked. "You must be mad that I ruined everything in your family. But Squirrelflight is still alive!" He meowed. "But I'm sorry."

Firestar looked up, blinking. "Shh," He meowed. "I'm not mad at you. I just don't want you to waste your breathe," He meowed.

Ashstar sat down, sighing.

"We're about to send you back," Firestar meowed. He padded up to Ashstar and touched his nose to Ashstar's nose. "Have strength."

Ashstar was sleeping in darkness. He felt pressure sweeping over him. He blinked open his eyes. He was still in the water. But energy surged through him. Ashstar slowly swam up, trying to get out of the darkness that threatened to pull him back down. He unsheathed his claws, trying to climb upward. A pale glow was coming through the water as Ashstar swam closer to the surface of the lake. He finally broke out of the water, coughing and panting. He was slightly close to the land. He started to swim towards the land, fear tugging at his pelt. What if he drowned again?

It was very dark. The moon floated high in an endless stretch of black sky that was drowned with white stars. They twinkled and flashed.

Ashstar felt the cold water tugging at his pelt, but he knew that with every heartbeat, he was closer to the land. His claws stretched out in desperation to grasp for the sand that lead up to the land. He watched as ripples spread out around him, getting farther and farther away.

"Bunnypaw!" Ashstar called out into the night. He hadn't seen Bunnypaw yet. Fear gripped him like icy claws. *What if he drowned trying to save me*? Ashstar didn't want to think about it. He swam faster. Finally, his paws hit the soft sand. He climbed the sand and pulled himself up onto the land, panting. *I feel like a RiverClan cat*!

He pulled himself farther up onto the land, not wanting to feel the

cold touch of water. Ashstar felt tired. His eyes were beginning to close.

Ashstar woke up. He got to his paws. The sun was high up in the sky, the clouds were passing over it.

Ashstar began walking. *Maybe Bunnypaw went home. Or maybe he went to RiverClan.*

"Ashstar! I'm so glad we found you!" A voice meowed.

Cinderheart, Graystripe, and Squirrelflight were running towards him.

Ashstar felt his heart break as he saw Graystripe. *Millie's dead, but Graystripe doesn't know.*

"Why are you soaked?" Cinderheart asked.

"I drowned trying to save Bunnypaw. Now I have five lives left," Ashstar meowed sadly. "I woke up in StarClan. Brindleface, Brightheart, Millie, and Softpaw were there. And Firestar was there too. But when I woke up, it was night, and I was so tired I couldn't even find Bunnypaw.

Graystripe's eyes widened in horror. Sadness clouded his gaze. "Millie...Millie's dead?" His voice made Ashstar's heart break. The terrible memory of Millie's death still burned in the back of his head.

"I'm sorry, but yes," Ashstar meowed. He then started to explain how she died, and how Brightheart died.

"This is so terrible!" Graystripe cried. "I can't find Hawkpaw, Rowanpaw, and Bramblepaw!" He meowed. "And now that Millie's dead, I have a feeling that all my kits are dead too!"

"Don't think that!" Ashstar meowed. He looked back at Cinderheart.

"Have you found Jaywing and Stoneheart?" She asked.

"Yes. But I've lost Stoneheart," Ashstar meowed. "But right now, we

need to get to my shelter."

When they got to the shelter, Ashstar had found out that Mossberry had found Stoneheart, Alderheart, and Ivypool. Ivypool said that she was expecting kits; Stoneheart's kits. Ashstar was slightly angry with Ivypool. In days like these, no cat should be having kits. But Ashstar was also happy for them.

Ashstar went out, searching for Jaywing and Mothpaw. He'd been worried about the two. Ashstar trudged up the hill when he had smelled something awful.

His nose wrinkled. Ashstar decided to ignore the horrible smell. He reached the top of the hill, heading in the direction where his first shelter was. The hill sloped down as he walked farther along the edge of the hill. He kept his weight balanced as he tried to walk down the hill without slipping. Ashstar peered through the fog that had covered the bottom of the hill. He saw the shadow of the rocky overhang through the fog. He started to walk towards it, feeling the dampness of the fog seep into his pelt.

"Ashstar!" A voice cried. Two shadows moved through the fog, getting closer. Jaywing broke from the fog, making it swirl around her. The wet grass soaked the fur around Ashstar's pads as he came closer to Jaywing to nuzzle her cheek. Mothpaw broke from the shadows and looked up at Ashstar happily.

"Where have you been?" Jaywing asked.

Ashstar then began to describe in detail what had happened. He told them about everything.

"You lost a life trying to save your son and now you have no idea where he is?" Jaywing asked.

"Yes," Ashstar meowed. "Maybe the rogues got him," He meowed.

"Lets hope they didn't," Jaywing meowed. She walked past Ashstar and began to walk up the slope, ahead of him.

Mothpaw walked beside Ashstar as they trudged up the slope.

"How did it feel to lose a life?" Mothpaw asked him.

"It felt like waking up, except I couldn't breathe," Ashstar meowed.

Mothpaw's eyes widened. Then she closed her eyes tight and wrinkled her nose. "What's that smell?" She asked.

Ashstar sniffed the air. He wrinkled his nose too. "Smells like something has died," He meowed as the rotten stench touched his nose.

Ahead of them, Jaywing screeched and tripped.

"Jaywing!" Ashstar ran ahead. "What happened?"

"I tripped over something!" Jaywing mewed. She dug her claws into the snow that hadn't melted yet. Snow was still covering the land, not much melted.

Jaywing's paws hit something hidden under the snow. She sheathed her claws and put her jaws into the snow, tugging at something under the pile. A creamy tail appeared from under the snow. Jaywing struggled to pull out whatever was hiding under there.

Ashstar gasped as he saw a pair of pale creamy legs get pulls from under the snow. Blood soaked the fur of this creature. What could it be?

Jaywing stopped tugging and lifted her head up, putting her paw on her nose. "It stinks!" She growled.

"What do you think it is?" Mothpaw asked.

"I don't know, but we'll find out," Ashstar meowed. He sank his claws into the pelt of the cream colored animal and started to drag it out of the snow. He was finally able to pull out the body of the creature, which was a cat. He saw a large gash carved into her side that went up towards her neck. The wound was still spilling blood. The body of the cat was soaked with blood, and her eyes looked frozen.

Ashstar gasped. Her whole body was frozen. She was more stiff than

a rock. He realized who this cat was now.

"Oh no! It's..."

Chapter 36

[image]

"Oh no! It's....Daisy!" Ashstar meowed. He looked down at her frozen body.

"What do you think killed her?" Jaywing gasped.

Ashstar crouched down, sinking his claws into the grass, feeling the cold earth beneath his pads. "Whoever killed her....."

"We'll find out," Jaywing meowed.

Mothpaw bent down to sniff at Daisy's wound; a long swollen gash that started at her flank and curved up to her neck. She put her paw onto the wound. "This wound got infected."

Jaywing turned to her daughter. "Maybe that's what killed her."

"But we need to find out *who* did this," Ashstar growled. He put his nose to the wound, sniffing. He tried to pick up a scent. Then, as the wind stopped blowing, the faintest scent bathed his tongue. The scent was familiar.

"Wolfpaw!" He growled. "Wolfpaw did this!" He cried.

Jaywing gasped. "Are you sure?"

"Yes! I picked up his scent!" Ashstar growled. He lashed his tail. "When I find him, StarClan knows what I'll do!" Ashstar hissed.

Jaywing shifted her paws. "He's your son," She meowed. "You shouldn't kill him."

"I should and I will," Ashstar growled, bristling. He arched his back, claws unsheathed.

Jaywing bristled and narrowed her eyes. "But he's your son," She

growled. "You can't kill your son!"

Ashstar flattened his ears against his skull. "Oh really? I will! Do you know all the pain he's put us in? He's killed Daisy! We're out here dying because of Wolfpaw! If only I killed him when I had the chance, and then we'd be back home in ThunderClan camp!" He meowed. He lashed his tail. "I had the chance to kill him, but I failed."

Jaywing backed up.

Mothpaw looked terrified. She started backing up and then turned, running across the hill.

Ashstar blinked at Jaywing.

Jaywing stood up, claws unsheathed. "Fine, go and kill him if that's what you want," She growled. "No one's going to help you do that," She hissed.

"Then...." Ashstar's voice trailed off. "I never told you," He whispered as she started walking away.

Jaywing kept walking away from him.

"I killed an innocent WindClan warrior. I thought it was Wolfpaw. I got so mad...I...I ripped out his throat," He muttered.

Jaywing stopped dead in her tracks, her tail flicking. She turned around, her whiskers flicking. "What?"

"I said I killed an innocent WindClan cat!" Ashstar cried. He sheathed his claws, feeling like a warrior; the time when he was insane. "I've been killing to many cats!" He growled. "But Wolfpaw... he deserves his death!" He growled.

He turned and raced down the hill, heading into the forest. Memories flashed through his mind.

/Flash back/

"It's another tom!" Brightheart meowed.

"Look!" Cinderheart purred. "He's gray like his father!"

"Lets name him Wolfkit!" Ashstar meowed.

The little tom kit crawled over to his mom, quietly suckling.

/End of flashback/

Ashstar kept running, trying to get to ThunderClan camp.

/Flashback/

Wolfkit opened his eyes. They were a pretty amber color.

"Look! He's just like a wolf!" Cinderheart purred.

Wolfkit's amber eyes flashed in the darkness.

Ashstar purred.

/End of flashback/

Ashstar yowled as he tripped over a bramble. He got to his paws, gasping at the sudden sting of pain. He looked around, not remembering where he was for a second.

He sat down, looking at his bloody paw.

A twig cracked.

Ashstar jolted up, alarm making his pelt bristle. *I'm in trouble...*

"What are you doing here?" A voice asked.

Ashstar looked around, not seeing movement.

A creamy figure flashed out of the bushes.

"It's you," The voice grunted.

Ashstar looked at the cream tom. He had two scars on his chest, and his pelt was matted and dull, almost like he wasn't alive. His two fangs were showing and he had scars across his eyes. They were

very red.

"Who are you? And how do you know me?" Ashstar growled, lashing his tail.

"Well, I don't have a name," The tom meowed. "And I see you in my dreams," He meowed. "I came into the forest because I thought you'd be here," He meowed. "And look, here you are."

"Well, if you don't know my name, I'm Ashstar," He meowed. "I don't live in the forest anymore."

The tom narrowed his amber eyes. "Why not?"

"Because I got chased out of my territory!" Ashstar meowed.

The tom's eyes became slits. "So why are you here?" His dull creamy tail lashed.

"I'm on a killing mission," Ashstar meowed.

The tom unsheathed his claws. They were long and curled. He showed his sharp fangs. "Who are you going to kill?" He asked.

"My son," He meowed.

"How young is he?" The tom's voice grew excited.

Ashstar narrowed his eyes. "He's an apprentice," He meowed.

The dull creamy tom looked confused. "What's that?" He asked.

"When a kit becomes six moons old," Ashstar meowed.

The tom licked his lips. "Perfect...."

Ashstar looked at him weirdly. "So...." He began. "Where do you come from?"

The tom's amber eyes flashed. "When I was a kit," He began. "My twolegs had kits of their own. Something they call "children" or "kids". The "kids" they had took me and ran outside when it was rainy," The tom meowed. "They left me out there. I saw something

that looked like a cave entrance, so I walked over to it to get shelter from the rain. But when I walked in, I fell. I fell into rushing water. It smelled like dead stuff," The tom meowed.

He sat down, sheathing his claws and closing his eyes. "Other cats lived down there. And when I got out of the water, some young cats went up to me," He meowed. He unsheathed his claws and sank them into the grass. "And they always bullied me," He meowed. "They told me that this place was called the "sewers" and that a cat like me didn't belong there," The tom meowed. "And then, one of them came up to me and slashed my chest," The tom meowed.

Ashstar looked at the scars on his dull creamy chest.

"All I remember is my blood splattering the gray ground. And I lay there, my vision fading into black. My blood dripped into the gray water. And it turned red," The tom meowed. "When I woke up, I felt tired and I just wanted to get out of the "sewers". But then-"

"What are you doing on our territory?" A voice cut him off.

A black cat jumped from the bushes and pinned Ashstar down.

"Oh, have you finally come back to take Bunnypaw?" The tom asked.

"Get off of me!" Ashstar growled. He unsheathed his claws and sank them into the black cat's chest. He pushed him to the side.

The dull creamy tom rushed forward and sank his claws into the black cat's pelt. Blood dripped from the tom's wounds.

Ashstar got to his paws and looked at the creamy tom. "Come on! We have to rescue Bunnypaw!" He meowed as he took off running.

Chapter 37

The tom raced behind Ashstar.

"You won't get away!" The black tom yowled.

The creamy tom appeared at Ashstar's side.

"What are we looking for?" He asked.

"My son!"

"To kill him?"

"No!"

"I thought that's what you said!" The cream tom meowed.

"No! I meant my other son!" Ashstar growled. He raced ahead, crashing through the undergrowth. He burst through the bushes, his claws outstretched.

His claws sank into the pelt of a cat. ShadowClan scent bathed around him. He lashed out at the ShadowClan cat, blood leaping into the air.

The cream colored tom leaped from the undergrowth and landed neatly on his paws, watching Ashstar and the ShadowClan cat fight.

The black ShadowClan cat they saw earlier burst out behind the rogue.

Ashstar slashed the ShadowClan cat's eyes and turned to the black one. He slashed his cheek and kicked him into a patch of nettles. Ashstar turned to the cream tom. "Come on!" He growled, running.

The dull tom followed, his yellow eyes reflecting the trees.

Ashstar raced along a path edged by ferns and tall grass. He ran faster and crashed through the ThunderClan camp.

Cats turned and looked at him, bristling and hissing.

Ashstar saw Crow. The sleek, black rogue leader walked from his den, his green gaze resting on Ashstar.

The creamy tom appeared behind him. When he looked at Crow, he bristled and glared at him.

"I know why you're here, Ashstar, but why are *you* here?" Crow glared at the creamy tom.

The creamy tom bristled even more. "Why are you ruling this Clan?" He asked. "You should've drowned in the sewers, the way you treated me," He growled.

"Oh, I remember giving you those scars across you eyes," Crow laughed. "Those scars make your dirty face even worse!"

The creamy tom unsheathed his claws. "You'll pay!" He growled. He leaped on Crow, digging his claws into Crow's eyes.

The black rogue cried in pain, hissing and trying to throw him off.

Ashstar raced forward to help him.

"No you don't!" A rogue growled. He leaped towards Ashstar.

Ashstar dodged him and leaped on his back, digging his claws into his shoulders.

"Help, Ashstar!" A voice cried.

Ashstar looked up. That sounded like Bunnypaw!

Claws slashed Ashstar's cheek.

Ashstar lashed at the tom's ears. The tom backed up, fur missing from his shoulders and his ears shredded.

Ashstar leaped on him and sank his teeth into the tom's ear, tearing it off.

The tom yowled and raced from the camp.

Ashstar raced after him, but teeth sank into his tail and pulled him back. Pain flared in his belly, making him collapse on the ground.

Crow was on top of him, his claws sinking into Ashstar's chest fur.

"You were pretty stupid to come here," Crow growled. His eyes were closed and had scratches across them. Blood dripped on Ashstar. "Now I can kill you."

Ashstar struggled in his grip.

Crow's jaws clamped around his neck.

"Hey!" A voice shouted.

A gray tabby leaped from the bushes. It was Jaywing!

Jaywing leaped forward and bashed into Crow, leaving Ashstar free of his grip.

Ashstar got to his paws.

"Ashstar, help!"

Ashstar turned, his heart stopping.

Bunnypaw screeched; he was covered in scratches and a cat was pinning him down.

Ashstar ran towards his son.

A pair of claws flashed through the air. Dark ginger-red fur flashed in his face.

Ashstar stopped in his tracks, staring.

"Did you really think it'd be this easy?" Russetstar laughed. In an instant, she slashed her claws at Ashstar's face.

Ashstar swung back just in time. He lashed out at her eyes, but Russetstar lifted up her face quickly and clamped her jaws on his paw.

Ashstar screeched.

Russetstar bit harder on his paw.

Ashstar swung his other paw in the air.

Russetstar lashed out, but Ashstar was quicker. He slashed her paw.

Russetstar then let go of his paw to screech in pain.

Ashstar lashed out and slashed Russetstar's face. He moved to the side to dodge her lashes and sunk his claws in her side, pushing her over and exposing her belly.

Alarm flashed in Russetstar's eyes. She then put her paws in the air, claws unsheathed.

Ashstar's paws hit her claws.

He growled in frustration.

Russetstar sprang from the ground and landed on Ashstar, sinking her claws into his shoulders, pinning him.

"Time to end it!" Russetstar growled.

Hey sorry this was short! I wasn't able to work on this during Christmas or the days after it! Plus, just before Christmas, my cat's kittens went missing, and we have not found them! :(My best guess is that they drowned in the sewers. My other cats, Cookie and Oreo, go to the sewers. But anyways, I hope you wait for the next chapter!

Chapter 38

She climbed from the swirling mist, but it washed around her like water, almost like it didn't want her to leave its presence.

"What do you want?" She asked.

"Come."

A shadow moved beyond the mist.

The she-cat crawled faster in the mist. A rock appeared in front of her.

As soon as the tom leaped on the rock, the swirling mist faded.

The she-cat blinked and looked at the tom.

"We're going to send you back," The tom meowed, his flame pelt rippling.

"How?" The small she-cat leaned forward, her white pelt turning dark as the tom's shadow loomed over her.

"But you'll be born again," The tom meowed. He flicked his tail. "By Ivypool."

"What?" The she-cat hissed. "I was born from Cinderheart! I just have to be born from her again."

"Softpaw! Cinderheart isn't expecting anytime soon!" The tom hissed. "Do you want to be reborn or not?"

"I guess I'll be reborn," Softpaw mewed. "But when I am, I'll tell Ashstar and Cinderheart that I'm Softpaw!" She cried.

"Good luck with that," The tom rolled his eyes. "You won't remember a thing!"

The she-cat looked uncertain.

The tom touched his nose to her forehead.

Mist swirled around them again, hiding what was happening to the cats.

Author's Note

The reason why chapter 38 was short..... well, I had more of my story, like 700 words, but my laptop was lagging badly and I had to shut it down. And plus Wattpad was being a piece of crap and wouldn't even save my story, and I couldn't even publish it. And now I all I have left of my writing is just those 210 words. But I hope you enjoyed what ever I posted on chapter 38. Chapter 39 won't be coming out very soon, but I'll give you a preview of it down below.

Ashstar stared at the moon. He was scared for Jaywing, since they couldn't find Alderheart. Ashstar trudged up the hill, remembering the fight with Russetstar. If he didn't blind her, he would've lost a life, but other cats kept thinking about his evil times. Bloody ashes...

Ashstar stiffened. He relaxed as the bad memories flooded from him. He remembered when he rescued Bunnypaw from Russetstar's command. He kept walking up the hill, sighing.

Chapter 39

Ashstar sighed. Searching for Alderheart was taking forever. He sat down, feeling hungry again.

He started to think. What if Alderheart was dead? Or what if he wondered off far away?

Ashstar was close to WindClan territory. He decided to walk towards the moor. He felt like spying. He looked around and scanned the moor. Nothing. He ran across the moor, feeling the wind tug at his fur. Life seemed a bit easy, even if he wasn't living in his camp.

Ashstar ran faster, the wind bringing the scent of rain. Ashstar didn't think much of it. He stopped dead in his tracks when he heard a screech. His pelt prickled with anxiety. Crouching, he began to sneak across the moor, heading to where he thought WindClan's camp would be. He smelled heather and crept closer. He then found the camp, hearing voices, but also smelling blood.

Ashstar ran to a clump of heather and hid. He peered through the heather.

Onestar was battling with a ShadowClan cat. A black cat then leaped from the nursery, carrying the scruff of a dead cat.

Ashstar gasped. It was Crow! Ashstar sunk his claws deep into the earth. He felt the urge to jump from the heather and leap on Crow.

Onestar was laying in a pool of blood, a gash on his leg bled heavily.

Ashstar felt like he had to do something. *But Onestar is dead...*

Onestar then scrambled to his paws. He flattened his ears, but didn't see Crow coming at him.

Crow leaped on him, knocking the WindClan leader over. His jaws then sank into Onestar's throat.

Ashstar leaped forward, landing on Crow's back. He sunk his claws into his shoulders and pulled him back. Ashstar landed on the ground, Crow rolling back.

"You again!" Crow growled. He leaped forward, claws extended.

Ashstar whipped to the side and quickly lashed out, his claws sinking into Crow's throat. He shoved him to the side.

Crow rolled on the ground, staining it red.

Ashstar crawled to Onestar's side.

Onestar coughed and scrabbled to his paws. "Thank StarClan you're here!" He meowed.

Ashstar looked at him, then leaped at Crow again. His claws sunk into Crow's throat. Blood oozed from the gash.

Crow flailed helplessly in his grasp. Then, he stretched his neck, tearing the wound farther. He opened his jaws to bite Ashstar's paw. Ashstar yowled but refused to let go. He then slashed again, the wound deep.

Crow yowled with pain, then gasped. His thrashing slowed, then he lay still.

Ashstar backed away, his paws covered in blood. He watched as blood spilled from the neck wound, then it pooled around Crow.

He turned back to Onestar, who was on the ground again. *Was he dead*?

Ashstar looked around hopelessly. Maybe Crow was dead, but this battle wasn't over yet.

Then, a yowl rang across the clearing. Russetstar stood on a tall rock. "Rogues! ShadowClan!" She called.

ShadowClan warriors shoved their enemies to the ground and then raced to the clearing.

They all stared at Crow. Then, Crow jerked awake.

Ashstar gasped. It was like he'd never been dead.

Crow scrabbled to his paws. The wound on his throat wasn't even there anymore. He blinked open his amber and glared at Ashstar. He then turned to Russetstar. "We shall be leaving," He meowed.

"Yes, Crowstar," Russetstar dipped her head to him.

Ashstar gasped. *Crowstar?* How could he have nine lives? How could StarClan make him a leader? He felt angry and sunk his claws to the ground.

As they left, Kestrelflight scrabbled from his den. "Onestar!" He cried out. He stopped beside the WindClan leader, herbs stuffed in his mouth.

Ashstar scrabbled forward.

"Alderheart!"

A dark ginger shape moved from the medicine den.

"Alderheart?" Ashstar gasped. Why would Alderheart be here?

Alderheart looked at Ashstar, his amber eyes flashing with joy.

"Ashstar!" He cried. "I thought I'd never find you!" He mewed.

"There's no time to talk! We need to heal!" Kestrelflight yowled.

Alderheart raced around, trying to find any survivors.

Ashstar felt useless here. His own wounds burned.

He then heard paw steps behind him. "Ashstar?" A voice called out.

Ashstar turned around, racing to the voice.

Stoneheart appeared through the heather. "Ashstar! You're all scratched up!" He meowed. "Care to explain? Like where have you been?"

Ashstar shook out his pelt. "The rogues were attacking WindClan!" Ashstar mewed. "I was able to kill Crow," He meowed.

"That's good!" Stoneheart meowed.

"Maybe it is, but he's Crowstar now! He came back alive when I killed him! He's a leader with nine lives now!" Ashstar growled.

Stoneheart flinched. "What?" He gasped. "He can't!"

"Well now he can," Ashstar grumbled. "Alderheart has been hiding in WindClan's camp this whole time," He growled.

"We need him right now then!" Stoneheart meowed. "Ivypool started kitting!" He mewed.

"That's why you came here?" Ashstar asked. He turned and ran to get Alderheart. "Alderheart! You may have to stop and come here! Ivypool is kitting!" He yowled.

Alderheart looked up.

Kestrelflight blinked at him. "Onestar is dead," He murmured.

Alderheart looked at him, his eyes clouding with sympathy.

Kestrelflight dipped his head. "Just go and help Ivypool," He meowed. "I can take care of this myself," He meowed.

Alderheart raced to Ashstar. "Where is Ivypool?" He asked.

Ashstar turned around and padded up the small slope. "Follow me."

Chapter 40

Ivypool had had two healthy kits. A flame colored tom named Firekit and a fluffy white she-kit named Fluffykit.

For some reason, Ashstar thought of Softpaw when he saw Fluffykit. She looked so much like his daughter.

"Ashstar," A voice echoed in the big fox den.

Ashstar turned and padded into the light and saw Stoneheart. "Is something wrong?" He asked.

"Kestrelflight is here," Stoneheart meowed.

Ashstar walked past him and padded towards a patch of ferns.

Kestrelflight stood beside the ferns. Harespring, Ashfoot, and Nightcloud stood around him.

Kestrelflight blinked at Ashstar. "Not many survived," He meowed.

Two kits moved from the ferns. The were chasing each other.

"Fernkit, Rabbitkit," Harespring called. "Please sit down," He meowed.

"We were thinking about joining you," Kestrelflight meowed, flicking his tail. "Can we? We have nowhere to go. Our camp was destroyed."

"You can join us," Ashstar meowed. "We were going to move away

from this place. We can't stay by the lake," He meowed. He sat down. "The Clans will have to move away from here. ShadowClan has turned on us. Your Clan is destroyed. My Clan has been torn apart. And I'm not sure about RiverClan. They could all be dead," Ashstar meowed. "I know what Russetstar and Crowstar are capable of doing," He growled.

Stoneheart appeared beside him. "Ashstar, I sent out hunting patrols," He meowed.

"Good," Ashstar praised his son. "We're leaving tomorrow."

Stoneheart jumped back. "What? You never told me?"

"We can't stay here any longer. We'll all die!" Ashstar growled. He lashed his tail.

Stoneheart blinked at him, sighing. "I guess you're right," He meowed.

"So when the patrols come back, I'll tell them," Ashstar meowed.

"Ok," Stoneheart meowed, padding away.

Kestrelflight looked at Ashstar. "You've had a long day yesterday," He meowed. "Maybe you should rest," He meowed.

"Ok then," Ashstar meowed. Before turning away, a breeze blew across the hill. It carried a strong scent of rain. Ashstar glanced at the distance. He could see the sky darkening up ahead, along with gray clouds rolling in.

"Looks like it might rain," Ashstar sighed.

Kestrelflight padded into the shelter of ferns. A tree loomed over them.

Ashstar padded into the fox den that he had all for himself. He was used to smelling fox and damp rock every time he woke up.

He curled up in the back of the den where the least light was. He closed his eyes and slowed his breathing.

Ashstar woke up. He was standing on a hill. Tall grass rose around him all of a sudden. Roots tangled around his paws.

Ashstar yelped in panic as a black hole opened up beneath his paws.

"Help!" Ashstar yowled.

A set of paws covered his mouth. Claws sunk into his lips.

Ashstar couldn't breathe. He closed his eyes, hoping the dream would end.

He felt himself being pulled into the ground.

"Rest forever!" A voice screamed.

Ashstar opened his eyes again. It was black all around him. He moved his paws.

A pair of amber eyes opened from the darkness.

"Hello, Ashstar," The cat growled.

"Who are you?" Ashstar asked.

"You really don't remember me?" The voice asked. He stepped from the shadows, a bit a moonlight bathed his gray pelt, turning it silver. It was Wolfpaw.

Ashstar looked up, the sky was black with a huge white moon floating through the clouds. How'd that happen? He turned back to Wolfpaw. "Wolfpaw?"

"It's Wolffang now," The tom corrected him.

Ashstar gasped. "Why are you here?"

Wolffang's eyes flashed. He stalked over to Ashstar, his tail flicking. "Maybe you should be asking why *you* are here."

Ashstar growled.

"The Dark forest waits for us," Wolffang meowed. "It's only a matter

of time."

"What?" Ashstar hissed.

"The Dark forest will rule everything. Once Russetstar dies, she'll join them. And she'll command a powerful army of cats. She'll be unstoppable!" He laughed.

"What do you mean? The Dark forest can't do that!" Ashstar growled.

"They can," Wolffang purred. His claws flashed in the moonlight. "You want to leave this place. But wherever you go, I'll be there," He growled.

"Are you dead then?" Ashstar asked.

"I am," Wolffang meowed. "But that doesn't mean I'm not evil," He growled, his ear flicking. "The Dark forest cats are training to kill. They will rise," Wolffang meowed. His pelt grew lighter. Then, it faded.

Ashstar felt horrible. The Dark forest? How could they break into the real world?

Ashstar then started falling through the darkness. He yelped.

Ashstar woke up in his nest. The nest was damp. He heard the pounding of rain outside the fox den. Water was trickling into the den. Ashstar scrabbled to his paws and crawled out of the fox den. Dark gray clouds crashed above him. He padded over to where the WindClan survivors were sleeping. They weren't there anymore.

Ashstar turned around. The rain pounded heavier on his pelt.

"Ashstar! Over here!" A voice called.

Jaywing stood on a far hill, her pelt soaked.

Ashstar ran towards his daughter.

"It's flooding! We have to leave!" Jaywing yowled. "We must get to

high land!" She meowed.

Ashstar scanned the distance, hoping to find something that would be tall.

Chapter 41

Ashstar had followed Jaywing to the shelter where the rest of his Clanmates were hiding. Rain pounded outside of the high den. Ashstar put his chin on his paws. He didn't get sleep. The rain made him worry. It was already flooding.

"Ashstar, we need to move!" A voice meowed.

Ashstar scrambled to his paws, feeling dizzy. When could he ever get a moment of sleep? His paws slipped on the damp ground. Ashstar hissed, annoyed. He crawled from the den, and as soon as he got out, rain soaked his fur and streamed down his face and whiskers. "I never knew a storm as bad as this would happen!" He growled.

Jaywing looked around. "I...I'm not even sure where to go!"

"Jaywing, will we all die?" Mothpaw asked, her sister, Sootpaw, coming to stand beside her.

"Ashstar!" Alderheart cried. "Birchfall is missing and Ivypool's two kits are missing!" He mewed. "I can't find them!"

"I'll find them," Ashstar promised.

"I'm coming with you," Ivypool meowed. "I won't let my kits die!" She mewled.

Ashstar didn't have a clue where he was going, but he felt this was

the right way. He turned around a corner, slipping on the wet ground. He then fell on his side, sliding towards a ledge that dropped to the river. His claws held onto the ledge. The rushing water crashed under his paws. "Ivypool!" He cried.

Ivypool gasped. "Ashstar!" She sunk her teeth into his scruff and pulled him up onto the wet ground.

"Thanks, Ivypool," Ashstar meowed.

"Come on," Ivypool meowed. She turned and started to slowly run.

Ashstar followed her, his paws skidding the wet grass.

The rain started to get harder. Wind drove the rain into Ashstar's face. His paws started to kick up mud and his pelt was dirty and soaked. He kept running, determined to find Firekit and Fluffykit.

Ashstar ducked under a tree that had fallen. It must of been hit by lightning. Leaves were still hanging from the branches in thick clumps, almost like bushes or moss had grown on the tree. When Ashstar's fur touched the leaves, a shower of water poured on him, soaking his fur even more. Icy water seeped so deep it reached his skin. Ashstar then heard wailing.

"Help!"

It sounded like Birchfall.

Ashstar ducked out from under the tree and kept running towards the wailing. He could see murky water up ahead through the pouring sheets of rain. Ashstar felt his heart quicken. What could be up ahead? Trouble?

"Help!" The cat wailed again.

Ashstar raced forward and stopped in his tracks, seeing Birchfall standing on a small piece of land, Firekit and Fluffykit surrounding him, mewling.

"Ashstar!" Birchfall wailed. "Help me! I don't know what to do!" Birchfall meowed, digging his claws into the tiny piece of land.

Water surrounded him.

Ashstar padded up to the water's edge. He could swim across, but that would probably cost him a life, and the distance between him and Birchfall was long.

Ivypool raced behind him and stopped beside him, her pelt just as soaked as his.

"Oh no! Ashstar, Firekit and Fluffykit are trapped! What are we going to do?!" Ivypool cried. She then put her paw in the water. "To save them, I have to swim!"

"No!" Ashstar growled. "You can't swim over there! You'll get hurt. Let me swim over there. I'm a leader with five lives left, but you only have one, so let me swim to Birchfall," Ashstar meowed. He put his paws in the shallows.

"Birchfall!" Ivypool cried all of a sudden.

Ashstar turned to the water, his heart quickening.

Birchfall was swimming in the water, Firekit's scruff in his jaws.

"No!" Ashstar yowled.

Birchfall swam closer and closer within every second. He then reached the land, setting Firekit on the ground. Then he turned around, not taking a break.

"Birchfall!" Ashstar growled.

Ivypool bent down and gave Firekit frantic licks all over his tiny soaked body.

Ashstar's heart quickened. What did Birchfall think he was doing? He was going to get killed! Ashstar could see that Birchfall was struggling to swim in the water. Ashstar then heard the rushing of water in the distance. What was that? More rain?

Birchfall reached Fluffykit and grabbed her scruff between his jaws. He then turned and jumped back in the water, not even stopping for

a break.

Ashstar growled in annoyance. *He's going to drown*!

Ashstar put his paws in the water, ready to jump in and save his Clanmate, but then, his ears swiveled sideways to the rushing sound of water. He gasped in horror as a huge wave of muddy water came towards them, threatening to drown them all.

Ashstar turned back to Ivypool. "Ivypool quick! Get to high ground before you drown!" He yowled.

Ivypool gasped. "What about you?" She asked. "What about my other kit and Birchfall?!" She cried.

"Don't worry about your other kit! Just get to high ground! I'll take care of this!" Ashstar growled.

Ivypool raced off, Firekit in her jaws.

"Birchfall! Hurry!" Ashstar cried. The wave was getting closer, but also getting a tiny bit smaller every paw-length it moved.

Then, Birchfall stopped swimming forward and threw his head to the side. Then he swung his head forward, Fluffykit flying through the air. Ashstar raced forward to catch her. Then the wave crashed forward, covering Birchfall. Ashstar was flung backwards, a spray of water splashing his face. He struggled to his paws, water leaking from his fur and dripping from his whiskers.

He looked at the large spot of water, but Birchfall wasn't there. He dropped to the ground, feeling his heart ache. Birchfall never deserved to die. Ashstar felt stupid. *Why didn't I risk my life to save Ivypool's kits? Then, Birchfall would never be dead*!

"Ashstar! Are you ok?" Ivypool mewed. She stopped beside him.

"Birchfall...." Ashstar whispered. He then got to his paws and padded to the water's edge, looking at his reflection, the rain pounding on the water and splitting his reflection is half.

"Don't blame yourself!" Ivypool meowed. "It wasn't your fault."

"Yes it was," Ashstar growled, lashing his tail. "It was. I did nothing but sit back and watch Birchfall struggle then drown!" He cried.

Ivypool sat down beside him, Fluffykit and Firekit huddling under her belly.

"What Birchfall did was brave," Ivypool meowed. "He died the death of a warrior, and that's honorable. He was very brave to do what he just did, and he did it, even though he *knew* it was a risk," Ivypool meowed. "Not all cats survive, Ashstar. You shouldn't think that you should be able to save all your Clanmates."

Ashstar looked at her. "I guess you're right. Birchfall did die the death of a warrior," Ashstar sighed. He got to his paws. "We shall honor his death when Fluffykit and Firekit become apprentices. And when they become warriors," Ashstar meowed.

"Yes," Ivypool meowed.

Ashstar turned to her, purring. "Thank you," He whispered.

Ivypool started to walk off, Firekit in her jaws.

Ashstar bent down to pick up Fluffykit. He then started to follow Ivypool. She has the heart of a warrior and truly understands what the death of a brave cat means....

Author's Note AGAIN

Sorry for making you guys wait for so long! I had a ton of work to do for school(projects and all that) and I pretty much forgot about this story and didn't have any ideas for it! But sorry for not writing it! If you have a warrior cats oc, you could tell me their name and their description, their Clan, etc, and maybe I might include them in a part of my story! Suggest them down in the comments. Let me know what you think of the story so far! Please be patient for chapter 42!

Allegiances for Chapter 42

(Just to let you know who survived and who didn't)

ThunderClan-

Leader- Ashstar

Deputy- Stoneheart(training Sootpaw until Ivypool's kits become apprentices)

Medicine cat- Alderheart, Apprentice- Mothpaw

Warriors:

Jaywing

Mossheart

Sorreltail, apprentice, Rowanpaw

Graystripe

Squirrelflight, apprentice, Bunnypaw

Tawnypelt, apprentice, Bramblepaw

Queens:

Ivypool- Mother to Stoneheart's kits- Firekit and Fluffykit (Five moons old)

WindClan-

Leader- Harespring

(No deputy yet)

Medicine cat- Kestrelflight

Kits:

Rabbitkit

Fernkit

(RiverClan didn't survive)

ShadowClan-

Leaders- Russetstar and Crowstar

Deputies- Mist(Takes over after Russetstar dies) and Mud(Takes over after Crowstar dies)

Medicine cat- Littlecloud and Arch

Warriors:

Stick

Tigerheart

Dawnpelt

Blue

Crowfrost

Cloverfoot

Stone

Spike

Moon

Red

Shimmer

Apprenices:

Bloodpaw

Dovepaw

Eaglepaw

Chapter 42

It had been four days since the flood. Not many survived. Kestrelflight had lost Nightcloud to a sickness. Ashfoot had died to a sickness as well. Harespring remained along with Kestrelflight and Fernkit and Rabbitkit.

The only survivors in Ashstar's Clan were Jaywing, Ivypool, Stoneheart, Alderheart, Mothpaw, Sootpaw, Alderheart, Mossheart, Sorreltail, Squirrelflight, Graystripe, Cinderheart, Tawnypelt, Bramblepaw, Rowanpaw, Bunnypaw, Firekit, and then Fluffykit. Mossheart and Tawnypelt said that they wanted to join WindClan when they found a new home because they wanted to keep WindClan strong.

"The Clan is still strong," Ashstar had said to his Clan. He realized that ThunderClan and WindClan had survived. RiverClan had been destroyed, along with ShadowClan, which had been taken over by rogues, yet Ashstar didn't know what shape ShadowClan was in now ever since the flood happened.

They were heading across a hill. Ashstar could see a large twoleg place in the distance. He shuddered. Hopefully something was past that. Something good, land that hadn't been taken over yet.

"Hey Ashstar, we should stop and hunt!" Stoneheart meowed. "We need strength if we're going to travel for a long time," He meowed.

Ashstar realized he was right. "Ok," He meowed. "But first we should find shelter."

Ashstar and his Clan, along with WindClan, had decided to take

shelter in a small, yet thick, forest. They found a very tall tree with a hollowed out space under its roots. And next to that they had also found a rotten log.

Ashstar had an important announcement to make. He crawled onto a slightly large rock that was close to the hollow.

"All cats, WindClan too, come join me for a Clan meeting!" Ashstar meowed.

ThunderClan gathered around him, along with Harespring and Kestrelflight from WindClan. Stoneheart padded over to Ashstar to stand beside him.

"Listen up, ThunderClan," Ashstar meowed. He looked down at Bramblepaw, Rowanpaw, and Bunnypaw. Then he looked to where Firekit and Fluffykit were sitting.

"Bramblepaw, Rowanpaw, and Bunnypaw, you have trained hard. You did your best in the battle for survival and during the flood. I shall reward you in return. Bramblepaw, Rowanpaw, and Bunnypaw, do you wish to protect and defend your Clan at the cost of your lives?" Ashstar asked them.

The three apprentices stared at him, surprised.

Then, Bunnypaw puffed out his chest and lifted his head proudly. "I do," He meowed.

"I do!" Rowanpaw meowed, his green eyes shining.

Bramblepaw still sat there, but then lifted his chin and said, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I grant you your warrior names!" Ashstar meowed. "Bunnypaw, you shall now be known as Bunnypelt. StarClan honors you for being strong during the flood and having hope. Rowanpaw, you shall now be known as Rowandust, StarClan honors your brave heart and skill. Bramblepaw, you shall now be known as Bramblehawk, StarClan honors your courage, and I know you still mourn the loss of your brother, Hawkpaw," Ashstar meowed.

Bramblehawk dipped his head. "Thank you Ashstar. I will always remember Hawkpaw, and what it would be like if he was here right now standing beside me," He meowed. "I think we should give him his warrior name," Bramblehawk meowed.

Ashstar blinked and lifted his head to the stars. "Then Hawkpaw, if you're listening, you shall now be known as Hawkflight. You had a kind heart, and you made many friends," Ashstar meowed.

"Thank you, Ashstar," Graystripe meowed. "I really appreciate that name."

"Yes, thank you," Rowandust and Bramblehawk meowed together.

"Bramblehawk! Hawkflight! Rowandust! Bunnypelt!" The Clan cheered.

"Now I think it's time for WindClan to announce something," Ashstar meowed. He crawled down from the rock and went to sit beside Jaywing and Bunnypelt. Stoneheart and Cinderheart came over to sit beside him too.

Harespring looked around. "I've decided to let Mossheart and Tawnypelt join my Clan. Ashstar told me that Mossheart was a kittypet once, but since she decided to join my Clan first, I've decided that she will be my deputy when we get to the new home," Harespring meowed.

Kestrelflight nodded.

"And also, Fernkit and Rabbitkit will now be apprentices. They will start their first day of training. Fernkit you shall now be known as Fernpaw, and Rabbitkit, you shall now be known as Rabbitpaw, " Harespring meowed. "Ashstar, would you mind if two of your Clanmates became the mentors for Fernpaw and Rabbitpaw?"

"I wouldn't mind," Ashstar meowed. "Jaywing, do you mind mentoring Fernpaw?" He asked his daughter.

"I'd love to mentor her!" Jaywing mewed.

"Alright then, Jaywing will be your mentor, Fernpaw," Harespring

meowed.

"I'll be Rabbitpaw's mentor!" Bunnypelt meowed.

"Ok. Bunnypelt, you can be Rabbitpaw's mentor," Harespring meowed.

"Wait!" Rabbitpaw mewed.

Harespring looked at him. "What's wrong?" He asked.

"I don't want to be a warrior!" Rabbitpaw meowed. "I want to be a medicine cat!" He mewed.

Harespring glared at him. "How could you in a time like this? WindClan needs warriors if it is to survive!" He growled.

"I know that!" Rabbitpaw cried. "But what will we do when Kestrelflight dies?" He growled.

Harespring flinched.

"Harespring, let Rabbitpaw be what he wants to be," Ashstar meowed. "Besides, your Clan would be stronger if you had a second medicine cat," He pointed out.

Harespring blinked at him. "I guess you're right," He sighed. "Rabbitpaw, your mentor will now be Kestrelflight," He meowed.

"Thank you!" Rabbitpaw meowed. He turned to Kestrelflight. "I want to start training right now!" He mewed.

"We should all go to sleep, actually," Ashstar meowed. "We need to rest. We'll need our energy if we're going to travel," Ashstar meowed.

"Yes," Harespring meowed. "And we still aren't sure how long we're going to travel for," He pointed out.

Ashstar walked to the hollow, his paws aching. He curled up, tucking his tail over his nose.

Jaywing ducked into the den and curled beside him. Cinderheart curled up on the other side of him.

Stoneheart's heart poked into the den. "Ashstar, would you like me to take watch?" He asked.

Ashstar opened one eye. "Yes," He meowed. He yawned and curled up tighter.

Bunnypelt ducked into the den, seeing Ashstar curled up with his daughter and mate. He looked at them, then stepped over them, going to the very back, where little space was.

Ashstar closed his eyes once more, but he opened them again only to see that he was standing in the dark. He looked behind him. A gray tom with amber eyes was looking at him, smiling.

"Wolffang?" Ashstar muttered.

"Yes, it's me!" Wolffang growled. "I can't believe I'm doing this but I'm here to give you a warning," He growled. "I'm just warning you about the rogues....ShadowClan," He murmured. "You better train your Clan, because we'll come after you soon," Wolffang meowed.

Ashstar flattened his ears.

"Don't get mad. I just gave you a warning," Wolffang growled. "Now you should be waking up."

Ashstar felt darkness cover his eyes. He then felt like his body was being pulled by a strong force. Then he opened his eyes, only to see that he was in the hollow again, safe. He got to his paws and stretched, careful not to wake the others sleeping around him. He crawled from the den, yawning. The sky was dark blue with a few stray clouds hanging around. The distance beyond the trees was starting to light up as the sun was trying to rise.

Ashstar saw Stoneheart sitting beside the slightly large rock where he'd made the new warriors.

Stoneheart's ears pricked and he turned around, seeing Ashstar. He dipped his head to his father. "Good morning, Ashstar," He

meowed.

"Good morning, Stoneheart," Ashstar meowed.

Stoneheart narrowed his eyes. "You don't look so well," He meowed. "Did something happen last night?" He asked.

Ashstar sat beside him. "I had a dream," He meowed.

"Hold on," Stoneheart meowed. "Shouldn't we get Mothpaw and Alderheart?"

Ashstar didn't think they needed the medicine cats. "It's not a prophecy, it's a warning," He meowed.

"Who warned you?" Stoneheart asked.

"Wolffang did," Ashstar meowed.

Stoneheart looked at him. "Who's that?"

Ashstar realized that he never told any cat about Wolffang's death or his warrior name. "My son. He earned his warrior name and he's dead."

"Well that's good," Stoneheart meowed. "But what did he warn you about?"

"He said the rogues are coming for us," Ashstar explained. "He said that'll we'll need to train," Ashstar meowed.

"Then we need to find our new home quick!" Stoneheart gasped. "We need to have all four Clans like we once did!" He meowed.

"I know," Ashstar meowed. "And that's why I'm going to send out two patrols to search for it," He meowed.

Chapter 43

Dovepaw shoved her brother, Eaglepaw. He leaped on her and they both tumbled on the ground, swiping at each other with soft paws.

"Play with your claws unsheathed, that'll train you faster!" Crowstar growled.

"Why though?" Dovepaw asked. "That's against the warrior code."

Crowstar then lashed out at her, slicing her ear right off.

Dovepaw was flung backwards from the force. Her right ear bled heavily now, blood trickling in her face and dipping on the ground.

"Hey!" Eaglepaw growled.

"That'll teach ya not to disobey me," Crowstar growled, walking off.

Dovepaw lay on the ground, crying. Eaglepaw ran over to help her get to her paws.

"Dovepaw, are you ok?" He asked.

"I- I think so," Dovepaw whispered. "I want to leave," She whispered.

"I know," Eaglepaw meowed. "I promise I'll get us out of here," He meowed.

"Who would we live with though?" Dovepaw asked.

"We'll find the Clans," Eaglepaw meowed.

"But they left five moons ago," Dovepaw mewed.

"We can find them!" Eaglepaw mewed. "Come on," He meowed. He began to walk to the camp entrance.

Dovepaw walked beside him, purring.

"Where do you think you're going?" Crowstar asked.

"Hunting," Eaglepaw meowed.

"Are you sure?" Crowstar asked. "Blue! Get over here!" He called.

Dovepaw and Eaglepaw's mother, Blue, walked over to him.

"What is it?" She asked.

Crowstar then turned towards Eaglepaw and Dovepaw. "This will teach you not to betray your Clan," He growled. He turned back to Blue and swung his claws across her throat.

Blue yowled in pain. But then she unsheathed her claws and leaped on Crowstar, digging her claws into his shoulder.

Crowstar shook himself violently and swung her off. Blue flew through the air, the blood from her throat wound spraying Crowstar and the ground. Blue's shriek was cut off as her back hit the air, and a snapping sound echoed across the camp.

Dovepaw stared in horror at her mother's broken body.

"Run!" Eaglepaw cried.

Dovepaw dashed out of the camp as fast as she could, dust flying behind her.

Eaglepaw sprinted ahead of her, and they would not slow down. He took a turn in front of her, and Dovepaw followed.

"I will send out two patrols," Ashstar announced as his Clan gathered around him. "Jaywing, I'd like you to lead a patrol. Take Graystripe and Sorreltail. Head beyond the twoleg place. Bunnypelt, I'd like you to take Squirrelflight and Bramblehawk. Head beyond the hills," Ashstar meowed.

The two patrols headed off, and Ashstar padded over to Stoneheart. "Send out the hunting patrols," He meowed.

"Ok," Stoneheart meowed.

Ashstar started to walk away from the camp. He wanted some alone-time, some time to himself. He wanted to to a break from all the hard work he had to do. He was just starting to head out when all of a sudden, three shapes emerged on the hill. They were cats. Ashstar was confused. *Was the patrol back already*?

He walked towards them more, smelling a rogue scent. He bristled. *Did the rogues find them*? He slid out his claws and started to walk closer to them. "Show yourselves!" He hissed.

The bigger cat lowered its head and ran towards him, the smaller cats walking behind him.

"Ashstar! It's you!" The tom meowed excitedly.

Ashstar then realized that this was Gorsetail. It was a cat from WindClan. But how did he find his way here? "Gorsetail! But how?"

"I was out hunting when the attack on WindClan happened," He explained. "And I was being dumb and ran away until it was over. I wish I could go back and fight for my Clan," Gorsetail meowed.

"Who are those two?" Ashstar asked. They smelled like rogues.

"Apprentices that escaped from the rogue camp," Gorsetail meowed.

Ashstar looked down at them. One was a dark gray she-cat with aqua eyes and a half right ear that had dried blood on it. The other was a golden tom with green eyes.

"That's Dovepaw and Eaglepaw. They're littermates," Gorsetail meowed.

"Crowstar did that to her ear," Eaglepaw muttered.

"Crowstar forces cats to train with their claws unsheathed,"

Dovepaw meowed. "Be we didn't do that and Crowstar punished me. The medicine cat wasn't allowed to treat me," Dovepaw meowed.

Ashstar gasped.

"And when we tried to sneak out of the camp to find the other Clans for help, Crowstar saw us and killed our mother right in front of us," Eaglepaw meowed sadly. "She tried to fight back but Crowstar snapped her back in half."

Ashstar blinked at them, pain filling his eyes. "What a terrible leader," He growled. "I understand why you left."

"We want to join your Clan and learn about everything you know," Dovepaw meowed.

"And we should get your wound treated," Gorsetail told Dovepaw. He looked up at Ashstar. "You have a medicine cat, right?"

"Yes. Alderheart, Mothpaw, and Kestrelflight and his new apprentice, Rabbitpaw," Ashstar answered.

"Wait, Kestrelflight?" Gorsetail gasped, his tail flicking.

"Some of WindClan survived that flood. Harespring and Kestrelflight along with two kits, Fernkit and Rabbitkit, but now they are Rabbitpaw and Fernpaw," Ashstar meowed proudly.

"Then I'm glad I came back," Gorsetail meowed.

"But Tawnypelt and Mossheart decided that they would join WindClan when we find the new home for us," Ashstar told him. "Harespring has already decided to make Mossheart the deputy since she decided to join his Clan first," Ashstar meowed.

"Wasn't she a kittypet?" Gorsetail asked.

"Yes. But she's really brave!" Ashstar mewed.

"That's really strange that Harespring would choose a *kittypet* to be deputy," Gorsetail growled. "Maybe when he knows I'm here and

sees me, he'll make me deputy," He purred.

"Do you really think he will?" Ashstar growled. "You abandoned your Clan when they were fighting for their life!" He lashed his tail and blinked at Gorsetail.

Gorsetail flinched and lowered his head. "Maybe you're right," He whimpered. "Maybe I should leave again and not go to WindClan. I know Harespring wouldn't want a traitor living in his Clan."

Ashstar gasped. "No, you can't leave when WindClan is falling apart like this!" He meowed. "You have to stay and be in WindClan. That will prove that you're still loyal," He whispered. "You will make WindClan strong again," He meowed. "You just have to do it. You have to prove to Harespring that you're still loyal," Ashstar meowed, trying to encourage him.

Gorsetail looked up at him, the pain in his eyes now replaced by hope. "You're right! I just have to work twice as hard as I used to!" Gorsetail cried. "I can make WindClan strong!"

"There you go," Ashstar whispered.

"Thanks," Gorsetail whispered.

They started to walk back to camp. Ashstar's spirits were lifted as he walked beside Gorsetail. He realized that WindClan was growing again, and soon there would be four Clans all over again in the new home.

Chapter 44

[image]

The tops of the Twoleg places were looming over Jaywing. Graystripe lifted his muzzle to sniff the air. "I smell kittypet scent," He pointed out. Sorreltail looked towards a fence. "Maybe we could ask the kittypets if there's some territory around here," She mewed gently.

Jaywing turned to look at her. "The kittypets wouldn't know anything," She growled. "They don't explore around here."

"Are you sure about that?" A rough voice called.

The three warriors looked up to see a brown male kittypet. He looked a bit old. His blue collar was torn and his right ear tip had a nick in it.

"What are cats like you doing around here?" The tom asked.

"Who are you?" Jaywing asked.

"Huh? The name's Rust," The cat meowed. "What are you doing here?"

"Well we came to search for territory," Jaywing explained. "And Sorreltail just now suggested we should ask the kittypets."

"Oh yeah. But you think we're fat, lazy old cats. Think again. Because around here, we hunt and fight!" Rust meowed. He unsheathed his claws; they were long and dirty and glinted in the strong sunlight.

"Ok, ok," Jaywing growled. "I was just saying," She muttered.

"Rust!" A she-cat crawled on the fence toward him. She was a pretty she-cat; a calico with short fur and pretty blue eyes along with a pink collar. She seemed nice.

"What do you want, Flower?" Rust growled.

"I just wanted to see what was going on over here," Flower muttered, her blue eyes gleaming with guilt. "I'm sorry."

"Better be!" Rust growled.

"Hey! Act nicer! You're always being a grumpy old cat," Flower growled.

"Well you're always being too kind-hearted!" Rust growled. Then, he slashed her cheek with his claws, blood spraying the ground. Flower lost her balance and fell on the ground. Her shoulder hit the ground hard.

Jaywing bristled. This cat was a threat. A dangerous one. She unsheathed her claws. Jaywing crouched, bristling, ready to fight this cat.

Sorreltail crouched beside Flower. "Oh no!" She meowed. "You've sprained your shoulder," She meowed. She turned to Jaywing. "Jaywing, we should go back and let Alderheart take care of her," She muttered.

Jaywing kept her eyes on Rust. *I want to claw that stupid smirk off his face*! Without warning, she leaped, her claws extended. Her body crashed into Rust's body, her claws dug into his pelt.

They both fell off the fence, hitting the ground with a dull thud. Jaywing slashed at his cheek and blood sprayed her face. She hissed with rage. Then, the door to the twoleg den crashed open, which made a twoleg yowl, and a medium sized dog came running outside.

Jaywing got herself untangled from Rust and jumped to her paws. She jumped up on the fence. But something made her look back down. She looked down to see Rust still on the ground. He seemed to be in a lot of pain. *I'm a warrior, I can't leave him to die, even if he's dangerous*. She jumped down in front of him, protecting him from the dog. She lashed out at the dog and hit its nose. The dog yelped. Then it opened its jaws and sunk its fangs into Jaywing's pelt. She

screeched in terror as the dog lifted her into the air shook her as if she were a toy.

Jaywing felt her fur ripping. She could feel the pain of the dog's razor sharp teeth ripping her skin. She saw her blood flying through the air. She screeched in terror. Jaywing blindly lashed out at the dog's muzzle, but then the dog threw her back against the fence with a sickening thud. Jaywing could barely move. The dog moved closer to Rust, its jaws about to clamp around his neck, ready to kill him. Jaywing stood on her paws, feeling dizzy. *No, I have to fight*!

Graystripe leaped on the fence, hissing with rage, Sorreltail was at his side, her tail lashing.

The dog dug its teeth into Rust's shoulder.

Jaywing leaped on the dog, her claws digging deep into its back. She screeched with fury and sunk her teeth into the dog's ear. She tugged hard, trying to rip it off. *I'll fight as hard as I can*!

The dog yelped with pain. It turned around, its jaws widened.

Jaywing yowled and slashed the dog's eyes with her claws. Blood spattered the ground as the dog dizzily spun around, shaking its head. Jaywing leaped to Rust's side and grabbed his scruff in her jaws. He was heavy, but she had to carry him over the fence. With the dog stunned, Jaywing crawled over to the fence, Rust's bloody scruff in her jaws.

Teeth clamped into her tail and pulled her backwards, away from the fence. The dog! Jaywing screamed and clawed at the ground, but it was hopeless. The dog sunk its teeth into her flank, and fresh blood spilled from the wound. Jaywing yowled with terror as the dog turned her around and widened its jaws, heading for her throat. *I'm going to die*! She closed her eyes tight, waiting for an extreme amount of pain to flood over her.

Something pushed Jaywing out of the way. It was Graystripe!

"Get off her, ugly brute!" Graystripe hissed to the dog. He slashed at the dog, blood flying through the air. Graystripe sunk his fangs into

the dog's throat and slashed at its eyes. He then jumped back from the dog and turned to Jaywing. "Come on!" He yowled.

Jaywing could barely run. Her shoulder hurt and the dog had wounded her badly. She ran, though, hoping that that stupid dog wouldn't pull her from behind again. Jaywing clawed her way up the fence, but when she jumped down, she hurt her back leg, which had a gash in it and blood was trickling heavily from the wound. "Where's Rust?" She asked.

"We got him over the fence," Graystripe panted. "Sorreltail ran for the cover of the trees with Rust and Flower," He meowed.

They ran up the hill and when they could see the sun setting, they both started to trot together.

"You know, you were really brave doing that," Graystripe meowed, his amber eyes looking at her. "You jumped back down to save and protect Rust from the dog. But you got badly injured and you could have died," He meowed. "Don't make me worry."

Jaywing looked at him. "Thank you for saving me," She panted.

Graystripe purred. "Any time," He meowed to her.

A moment of silence passed by. They stopped at the top of the hill.

Graystripe turned to her, his amber eyes shining. "You know," He began. "I like you."

Jaywing hesitated. She already had two kits. Mothpaw and Sootpaw. Could she have more kits? *Well, Cinderheart had a second litter*, she thought. She blinked at him. "I like you too!" She purred.

Graystripe turned and rested his muzzle on her muzzle. "I just don't understand why Ashstar could end up with a daughter like you," He purred. "He was evil. He wanted to kill."

"I know," Jaywing whispered. "But you know that Tigerstar took control of him," Jaywing meowed, trying to protect her father.

"I know," Graystripe meowed. "Now lets get home and get your

wounds treated."

Chapter 45

[image]

Another five days had passed since the patrols had gone out. Ashstar remembered seeing Jaywing, who had been wounded so badly by a dog in the twoleg place that she had to stay here. She seemed sad that she couldn't go back to patrolling. The twoleg place patrol had also come back with Rust and Flower, who used to be kittypets. They'd be a great help to the Clans. *I kind of like Rust. He seems like he'd be a great leader for ShadowClan. And Flower looks like a great leader for RiverClan*.

The patrols hadn't come back since sunrise. He hoped they were doing fine.

"Ashstar," A voice called.

Ashstar turned his head to see Rust.

"I'd like to thank that gray cat for saving me. Do you know where she is?" He asked.

Ashstar got to his paws. "I'd gladly like to show you," He meowed. Ashstar padded from his den and headed towards the medicine den. The breeze shook the leaves on the trees and ruffled Ashstar's fur. Peace was a nice thing. He stopped in the front of the medicine den. "Alderheart? Mothpaw?" He called.

The vines swished to the medicine den and Mothpaw stuck her head from the den. "Yes?"

"Rust wants to see Jaywing," Ashstar meowed.

Mothpaw's head disappeared. A moment later, Jaywing limped from the den. "What?" She asked.

Rust padded closer. "I'm sorry for putting you in danger. And thank you for saving for my life," He meowed.

Jaywing dipped her head. "A true warrior wouldn't have left you to die," She whispered.

Rust dipped his head to her.

Jaywing turned around and disappeared from Ashstar's sight.

A light touch on his flank startled Ashstar. He turned to see Cinderheart padding beside him.

"Ashstar, I think it's time that Jaywing's kits became warriors. They've worked hard," She meowed.

"I know," Ashstar purred. He touched her muzzle with his. "I almost thought that we should have more kits," He whispered to her as they started to walk away from the camp.

"Really?" Cinderheart gasped. She looked away. "Just thinking about what happened to our second litter makes me unsure."

Ashstar then remembered. He remembered Softpaw getting killed by her own brother, Wolfpaw. And then Wolfpaw became Wolffang and died, joining the Dark Forest. Then Bunnypelt became a warrior and was out on patrol still. Ashstar worried for him. "But think about our first litter!" He meowed. "Stoneheart and Jaywing have kits. They've grown so fast. And Stoneheart is deputy."

"I know," Cinderheart purred. "I love them. But why did you have to pick Stoneheart to be deputy? I know he's your son and everything, but you could've picked Graystripe," She meowed.

Ashstar looked away. "I guess it's because Stoneheart is strong and loyal and he's my son," He meowed.

"Leaders don't usually choose their kin to be their deputy," Cinderheart pointed out, flicking her tail.

Ashstar's ears pricked and he stopped dead in his tracks.

"What?" Cinderheart asked.

"Shhhh," Ashstar told her.

Paw steps were coming from the opposite side of Ashstar. He turned but only saw thick clumps of bushes and other greenery.

"Ashstar!" A voice called. "We've found land to live on!"

Ashstar gasped. "It must be the patrol!" He gasped. He raced toward their voices, jumping over large tree roots and bushes.

He stopped at a clearing and saw five shapes racing towards him on the hill. The bushes rustled behind Ashstar, and Cinderheart emerged beside him.

Stoneheart, Graystripe, Sorreltail, Tawnypelt, and Bunnypelt stopped in front of him.

"Ashstar, I think we've found land," Stoneheart panted.

Ashstar's eyes widened. "Where?" He asked.

"We couldn't exactly reach it, but it's beyond the mountains," Stoneheart began to explain. "We saw it past the mountains. The forest is large and there's a waterfall pouring down the mountain that spills into one part of the forest and makes a large river! There's even a large moor sitting right beside that!" He meowed. "We saw it all past the mountains! It was beautiful!" He panted.

"Yeah!" Graystripe agreed. He then stepped closer to Ashstar. "Is Jaywing ok?" He asked.

"Yes," Ashstar told him. He padded forward to touch noses with Stoneheart and Bunnypelt.

Cinderheart rubbed her muzzle against her kit's muzzle's too.

"Lets head back to camp and get ready," Ashstar meowed. "I'd be glad to leave," He nodded to Stoneheart.

"The patrol I sent out five days ago has returned with amazing

news. They've found a large territory beyond the mountains and we'll be leaving tomorrow!" Ashstar meowed.

"Ashstar, what about traveling through the mountains?" Cinderheart asked. "It'll be dangerous. There are blizzards and some cat could fall off and die!" She gasped.

Ashstar looked at her. He completely forgot about the dangers of the mountain. He'd never been there before, but he knew what it was like. And it would be a long journey. He remembered something about a Tribe that lived there. The Tribe of Rushing Water. He remembered that a cat called Stormfur had joined that Tribe.

"Cinderheart, I have an idea!" He meowed to her. He lifted his head again to look over his Clan. "The Tribe of Rushing Water should be able to help us over the mountains!" He meowed.

The cats down below started talking quietly.

Ashstar lashed his tail. "We'll be leaving tomorrow," He told them. As the cats went to their dens, Jaywing padded up to Ashstar. "Ummmm, Ashstar," She whispered.

Graystripe padded up beside her, his amber eyes shining proudly.

Ashstar crawled down from the large rock and looked at them. "What? Do you have any questions about the trip?" He asked.

Jaywing looked at him, her eyes filled with guilt. "I'm expecting Graystripe's kits," She muttered.

Ashstar gasped. "What? But you know we're going through hard times right now! Why'd you have kits at this moment?"

Graystripe took a step in front of Jaywing, almost like he was trying to protect her. "Calm down! It's not like she's going to have the kits *right now*, she'll be having them in a few moons," He meowed to Ashstar.

"Like I didn't know that," Ashstar growled. He turned away. "Jaywing, I want you in my den," He meowed as he walked towards

his den.

Jaywing ran towards him. "Ashstar, I'm sorry!" She meowed to him. "I'm just in love with Graystripe!" She whispered. "And my last mate, Bumblestripe, died," She muttered.

"I remember," Ashstar whispered. "I'm sorry, I just wasn't thinking. It's just that, we're going through hard times right now. And having kits will make this worse," Ashstar meowed. "But sleep in the medicine den tonight. You need to rest," He told her.

Jaywing's head hung low. She turned away from him.

"Good night!" Ashstar called to her, but he didn't get a response back. He crawled into his den and curled up to Cinderheart for warmth. He closed his eyes, sleep drifting over him.

Tribe of Rushing Water Allegiances

[image]

Stoneteller- Light brown tom (Used to be Pine That Clings to Rock)

Deputy: Ice That Forms On River (Ice)- White tom with blue eyes

Cave-guards:

Flower That Grows By River (Flower)- Creamy she-cat

Gray Sky After Dusk (Gray)- Gray tom with green eyes

Snowflake That Falls From Sky (Snowflake)- White she-cat

Leaf In Small Puddle (Leaf)- Brown she-cat with green eyes

Hawk That Lands In Tree (Hawk)- Brown tom with amber eyes

Wolf That Howls In Night (Wolf)- Dark gray she-cat with torn ears

Fire That Rages Through Forest (Fire)- Flame colored tom

Rain That Falls From Cloud (Rain)- Gray she-cat with splashes of white

Grass That Rustles In The Wind (Grass)- Light brown she-cat

Root Of Strong Tree (Root)- Light brown tom

Prey-Hunters:

Cloud In Night Sky (Cloud)- Dark gray tom with patches of white

Orange Sky Of Sunset (Orange)- Ginger she-cat

Rock That Parts Creek (Rock)- Brown tom with green eyes

Moss That Climbs Tree (Moss)- Brown she-cat with a short tail

Storm Of Rushing Water (Storm)- Dark gray tom with blue eyes

Lightning That Splits The Sky (Lightning)- Black tom with yellow eyes

Morning Dew On Spider Web (Morning)- Light gray she-cat

Frost On Morning Grass (Frost)- White she-cat with blue eyes

Ant Carrying Leaf (Ant)- Dark ginger tom

To-bes training to be Prey-Hunters:

Bug That Crawls On Tree (Bug)- Black tom with brown paws

Fish In Silver Pond (Fish)- Golden she-cat

Star That Shines At Night (Star)- White she-cat with patches of black

To-bes training to be Cave-Guards:

Puddle After Rain (Puddle)- Brown tom

Cry From Injured Bird (Cry)- Black she-cat

Chapter 46

[image]

It had been six days since they started traveling. Heavy snow rained around Ashstar. He shivered. At least no cat had died yet to this storm. They were already half way up the mountain. Icy wind blasted into Ashstar's face. Jaywing, who was beside him, had snow stuck to her face. She trudged through the snow.

Ashstar just hoped all of them would make it. All of a sudden, a yowl startled him. He turned around, trying to see what it was, but the only thing he could see was white. He turned to Jaywing and she looked at him, her blue eyes widened. "Don't go. We have to stay together!" He told her. *I'm not losing her*.

Ashstar led Jaywing down the mountain. In fact, he couldn't see or smell any cat now. But Ashstar's hope went up as he realized that the snow was getting lighter. He turned to check if Jaywing was still by him.

"Cinderheart!" Ashstar called out. "Stoneheart! Bunnypelt! Where are you?" He asked.

Jaywing shivered beside him. "Cinderheart!" She called out. "Graystripe!"

"Ashstar! Over here!" A voice called. It sounded like Rust. Ashstar ran towards the voice and saw Rust crouched on the snowy ground along with Ivypool and her two kits.

"Do you know where the rest are?" Ashstar asked.

"No. I don't know!" Rust cried.

"Rust! I've found some!" A voice called. It was Flower. The calico she-cat padded into view. Stoneheart and Bramblehawk were standing behind her. Stoneheart saw Ashstar and ran up to him. "Thank StarClan we've found you!" He meowed. He turned to touch his muzzle to Jaywing's head.

Ashstar touched his muzzle to his son's head. "You all need to get to safety," He meowed to them. "We'll all head farther up the mountain and try to find a cave," He meowed.

"Better yet, The Tribe Of Rushing Water!" Stoneheart gasped.

Ashstar blinked at him. "Yes. Maybe we should try to find them," He meowed.

Jaywing shifted her paws. "Ashstar, we need to find the others!" She cried. "Cinderheart is still out there along with Graystripe," She whispered.

Ashstar looked at her. "I know," He whispered to her.

"I'll look for them myself," Jaywing cried. She shot away from him, kicking up snow as she ran.

Ashstar looked after her. He turned back to Stoneheart. "She'll be fine," He whispered to his son.

Stoneheart blinked. "No! I'm going to go with her!" He meowed. He ran after Jaywing.

Ashstar watched them go, blinking. They were brave. Very brave.

"Aren't you going to go with them?" Bramblehawk asked.

"I trust them," Ashstar meowed. "As long as Jaywing has her brother by her side," He began, "She'll be fine."

Jaywing trudged through the snow, her brother right behind her.

"Jaywing, we've being searching for a few hours already," Stoneheart meowed to her. "What if they're dead?"

"No!" Jaywing cried. "They aren't! They can't be!" She mewed. She stopped in her tracks, the wind tugging at her fur. "They're still alive out there. Just somewhere."

"What if they've fallen off the cliff?" Stoneheart gasped.

"They couldn't of," Jaywing growled. The wind blasted her face, making her eyes sting. "I'll keep searching forever if I have to."

Stoneheart glanced at her, his yellow eyes reflecting the light snow. A snowflake landed on his nose, and he sneezed. He purred.

Jaywing couldn't purr. Not when her mother and mate were missing. She then thought of Mothpaw and Sootpaw. Her kits! Jaywing couldn't breathe. If she lost them, she didn't know what she'd do! She ran through the snow, tears streaming down her face. "Mothpaw!" She cried. "Sootpaw!" Her voice was so loud that it echoed around her. She continued to call their names over and over. Nothing even happened. No responses came back. Jaywing felt hopeless now. Now she was starting to believe that her kits were actually dead. She was about to give up when she heard the faintest sound of a meow.

Jaywing's heart almost stopped. Her paws prickled with hope. She ran towards the sound of the meowing.

"Jaywing!" Two voices squealed. Mothpaw and Sootpaw bounded up to her.

Jaywing stopped dead in her tracks and let her two kits crawl over her. They purred and purred, happiness surging through them. Jaywing got to her paws and licked their faces, purring. As she looked up, she saw Alderheart, Cinderheart, Kestrelflight, Harespring, Gorsetail, Graystripe, Rabbitpaw, Fernpaw, Mossheart, Tawnypelt, Squirrelflight, Rowandust, Dovepaw, and Eaglepaw. She'd found the rest of the Clan! Jaywing bounded towards her mother and thrust her muzzle in her face. Cinderheart rested her chin on Jaywing's head.

"I missed you so much," Cinderheart whimpered. "I was so worried!"

A soft lick on her shoulder startled Jaywing, and she turned to see Graystripe beside her. She purred. But Graystripe's eyes seemed dull.

"What's wrong?" Jaywing asked. She turned and realized that every other cat had the same expression on their face.

"Well," Alderheart began. "Dovepaw slipped and almost fell off the cliff. Eaglepaw tried to save her, but couldn't. And Bunnypelt died saving Dovepaw," Alderheart meowed sadly.

Jaywing gasped. "That's terrible!" She mewled.

"We know," Cinderheart whispered. "But he died the death of a warrior, protecting his Clan."

Stoneheart bounded up beside Jaywing and greeted his mother. They also told him about Bunnypelt's death. Stoneheart was sad, yet he also agreed that Bunnypelt died the death of a warrior.

The group started heading home. Jaywing didn't know how Ashstar would react to Bunnypelt's death. He was still mourning Softpaw's death. Jaywing felt sorry for him.

"We should be close," Stoneheart meowed beside her.

Jaywing had remembered that Stoneheart went to find Ashstar. He was the only cat in this group that knew where Ashstar was. Ashstar had also found The Tribe of Rushing Water. They were at the top of the mountain, and they said that they'd help. Jaywing felt happy, knowing that Cinderheart and her two kits were alive. She kept walking up the mountain top, Mothpaw and Sootpaw by her side. Stoneheart and Cinderheart were behind her, talking quietly.

Jaywing padded up the mountain, now feeling confident. Past this mountain, everything would be ok. They'd finally find a new home to live in....

Chapter 47

[image]

Ashstar woke up in the cave to the sound of heavy wind outside. A blizzard. It had been three days already since they had found the Tribe of Rushing Water. Stoneteller was nice enough to let them live in the cave for a few days. And once that blizzard was over, they would finally be able to start traveling to their new home. And when they did get home, Ashstar would make Jaywing's kits into warriors, and Ivypool's kits into apprentices. He'd also start to train Rust and Flower; Rust to be sneaky, and Flower to swim. Ashstar purred. It was nice that they could be away from those nasty rogues.

Paw steps echoed through the cave, and one of the Cave-Guards appeared beside Ashstar. It was Hawk. A Prey-Hunter was beside him. It was Frost. The two cats padded out of the cave. Ashstar wondered why they would go out in the middle of a blizzard. He got to his paws and stretched, yawning. He padded over to the fresh-prey pile and grabbed a small mouse. He took it and gulped it down in a few bites. Ashstar felt relaxed.

"Ashstar," A rough voice meowed behind him.

Ashstar turned to see Stoneteller padding towards him. "What is it?" He asked, his tail flicking and his whiskers twitching.

"We've seen the land you're talking about and we've been down there once. There's a ton of prey and right beyond that huge moor, there's a huge twoleg place. Maybe some kittypets will join your Clan," He meowed. "I know some of them that live there," He explained.

"That'll help us build the Clans back into their normal state," Ashstar realized. His tail swished over the cave floor.

"Seems like this blizzard won't end anytime soon," Stoneteller sighed. "You'll have to wait longer. Maybe tomorrow," Stoneteller meowed. Then he padded off, back into the cave where he usually slept.

Ashstar sighed and looked outside of the cave. It was still snowing heavily. He got to his paws and padded over to the dip in the cave where he was sleeping. He curled up in the moss, his tail tip twitching slightly. He closed his eyes, waiting for sleep to take over.

Ashstar woke up to the sound of cheerful voices. He opened his eyes and looked outside the cave. It was snowing lightly now, and the snowflakes were smaller. He got to his paws and stretched. A light touch on his shoulder made Ashstar turn around and he saw Stoneteller.

"It's time to go," He meowed sadly. "I'll lead you down the trail that we used. It might take a day or two to get all the way down, so keep your strength up and eat," The light brown cat meowed. He pushed a fat mouse towards Ashstar. "And I'll get us all some traveling herbs."

"Wait," Ashstar meowed. "I don't need any traveling herbs," He meowed.

Stoneteller dipped his head. "As you wish then," He sighed. He padded into the small den that was in the back of the cave.

After Ashstar ate the mouse, he stepped outside and saw all his Clanmates farther up the mountain. He raced up to greet them. Stoneheart and Jaywing were farther up, talking with Cinderheart and sharing a hawk together. Ashstar raced up to them.

Jaywing looked up, purring. "Ashstar, look!" She mewed. She flicked her tail towards the distance and down below them. Looks like Stoneheart had been right...

There were two forests beside eachother. A dark forest and light oak forest. Both were huge. And beside the two of them was another forest but with less trees. A large river ran straight through that forest and got smaller as it ran towards the dark forest and light forest. The river then split and one part ran through the dark forest while the other ran through the oak forest, then the river joined again farther down the two territories and ran through the moor and was cut off by a hill past the moor. It was perfect.

"It's beautiful," Ashstar meowed. He looked over at the waterfall that rushed down the side of the mountain, giving the river down below life. Ashstar stood still and let the wind tug his fur. He looked at the sun setting. It was so peaceful up in the mountains besides all those blizzards and the terrifying drop down below. It was just beautiful up here, being able to look down below and see everything. Ashstar felt like an eagle. He closed his eyes, thinking to himself. *Our new home will be perfect....*

"Lets go!" Stoneteller meowed. The old cat then began to move down the mountain slowly, Ashstar following him, his Clanmates right behind him. He followed Stoneteller as he turned a corner and started walking down a slope. The slope wasn't steep. He continued to follow Stoneteller.

A full moon was already in the sky by the time they had made it to a slighly large cave in the side of the mountain. They were getting ready to go to sleep. Sadly, they had no moss to sleep on, so they had to sleep on the hard cave floor. Ashstar curled up, Jaywing, Stoneheart, and Cinderheart laying beside him. He closed his eyes and instantly fell asleep.

Chapter 48

The blasting sound of the waterfall was right beside Ashstar's ears. Mist swirled around his paws, and the air felt humid. Ashstar remembered that when they had woken up, they already started moving down the mountain trail. Hawks flew up above.

He heard a sigh behind him. Jaywing slowly walked, her eyes half closed. "I didn't get any sleep last night," She meowed. She flicked her ear as a droplet of water sprayed from the roaring waterfall.

"Its ok, I didn't get much sleep either," Ashstar admitted, feeling her embarrassment.

"Well I couldn't get sleep anyway so I watched the moon in the night sky," Jaywing yawned. "I guess I could've at least tried to sleep. I had this weird dream of this gray cat," She meowed, but her voice was soon drowned out by the roaring waterfall. Water sprayed Ashstar's face.

"The water won't hurt you," Stoneteller called.

Ashstar turned to look at the waterfall. Now he could see that a path broke off from the ledge he was standing on, and led right to the waterfall and beyond it. Maybe there was a cave in there.

"Why have you stopped?" Jaywing asked her farther.

"Hold on," Ashstar meowed. He padded forward on that small path, small pieces of stone digging into his paws. He lashed his tail, and his whiskers twitched. The moist smell of cave bathed on his tongue. He crept forward, getting closer to the waterfall, the water spraying his fur, soaking him. He wouldn't mind getting a bit wet. Ashstar went under the waterfall and appeared on the other side.

He gasped in shock as he stared around the cave. Moss was covering the walls along with a few scattered puddles of water here and there. He turned around and looked at the waterfall, seeing the sun's bright glare through the foaming water.

Jaywing's face appeared right in the water, and she stared around, clearly interested in this cave. She padded up to him. "Ashstar," She whispered. Her voice bounced off the cave walls.

Ashstar flicked his tail. "This place has a weird feeling to it," He meowed, sinking into a crouch. "It seems as though it'd be a place for StarClan, though," He pointed out.

"We'd have to come back to this at night," Jaywing meowed. "This cave could have a connection to StarClan."

Ashstar nodded and rose to his paws, padding past Jaywing and going back under the waterfall. He appeared into the sunlight and saw Stoneteller farther along down the trail.

"We'd better catch up," Ashstar meowed to Jaywing as she appeared beside him.

It was already Sundown and the cats were now at the bottom of the trail. They all looked out over their new home, their eyes wide and their hopes high.

"Thank you Stoneteller," Ashstar meowed to the old tom, dipping his head. "We couldn't of made it without you," He purred.

"You're welcome," Stoneteller meowed to Ashstar. He dipped his head as well, his whiskers twitching. He looked up at the pink-blue sky, closing his eyes. "I'd better go," He meowed.

Ashstar's whiskers twitched. "I don't think you should go back up that long trail again," He pointed out. "You should take someone with you," He meowed, flicking his tail to Squirrelflight and Bramblehawk.

"No, I'll be fine, I promise," Stoneteller meowed. "But thanks for your help." The old cat turned and started to head up the mountain trail.

Ashstar watched him go, his thoughts whirling. *It would be a great help if that tribe would join us. Then we could be strong again*. But he already knew that the Tribe of Rushing Water didn't want anything to do with the Clans really. They never liked to live like Clan cats, they liked doing things their own way. It was fascinating.

"Hey Ashstar," Stoneheart padded up to him. "We should go find shelter before the moon comes up."

"You're right, but we should hunt first," Ashstar meowed. "Tell you what, Stoneheart, take a patrol to go and find a camping spot and I'll take a patrol to go and hunt," Ashstar meowed.

The moon was high in the sky as Ashstar returned to the bottom part of the mountain trail with his hunting patrol. They had caught a lot of prey. Ashstar dropped his mouse and robin on the ground, looking around at his cats. "We've hunted well today," He meowed.

"I wonder where Stoneheart and his patrol are," Jaywing meowed, looking over at the dark woods. Shadows were beginning to creep up towards the patrol, threatening to pull the cats into the darkness.

Harespring glanced up the mountain. "I just wonder what it's like to live up there, in those cold and harsh mountains," He meowed.

Kestrelflight nodded. "Those cats must get colds every day, living in those blizzards like that," He puffed.

Rabbitpaw and Fernpaw chased each other around. Mossheart glanced around, along with Gorsetail, who looked at her, a worried expression on his face. Tawnypelt groomed her fur.

Finally, after what seemed like waiting or ages, the sound of bushes echoed around Ashstar, and Stoneheart's patrol pushed through the dark forest to greet them.

"Have you found a good spot?" Ashstar asked.

Stoneheart nodded. "Yes. We actually think that this could be a good place for ShadowClan's camp," His son panted. "We should eat here and then go to the spot to rest," Stoneheart meowed.

All of a sudden, a hawk cried above in the night sky. It then swooped down, its gigantic wings spread open and its talons open, ready to clamp them around the cats' bodies.

Ashstar gasped in shock as he saw the hawk heading towards Fernpaw. He unsheathed his claws and leaped into the air, his claws hooking into the large bird's wings. Sharp talons raked his ears, and his blood leaped into the air. Ashstar sunk his fangs into the bird's neck, but then its sharp beak ripped at Ashstar's ear, tearing it off. Ashstar cried in pain and fell from the bird, hitting the ground hard and spraining his shoulder. He hissed and clenched his teeth as the hawk then wrapped its talons around Fernpaw's shoulders, ripping the small cat's fur and causing blood to spill from the fresh wound like water pouring out of a crack.

"Fernpaw, no!" Harespring screeched. He leaped on the hawk, sinking his teeth into its head and ripping its throat with his claws. The hawk fell limp in his jaws and the tom spat out a mouthful of feathers onto the ground.

Ashstar painfully rose to his paws, wincing at how much pain he was in. Kestrelflight raced over to Fernpaw, Rabbitpaw at his side.

Jaywing ran over to Ashstar, an expression of horror fixed on her face. She put her body against Ashstar's shoulder, trying to help him stand up.

Mothpaw and Alderheart quickly ran over to them.

"This is bad," The medicine cats wailed. "We have no herbs and no idea where to find them!"

Chapter 49

[image]

Ashstar opened his eyes to see that he was in den, his half-ear wrapped with cobwebs. It had been three days since that hawk attack. Yesterday, they had found a great place for a camp in ThunderClan territory. WindClan was already settling well in their new territory; they had found a small ravine where they would make their camp. ShadowClan had a great camp being built for them. Rust would be the leader for ShadowClan along with Flower becoming the leader for RiverClan. Ashstar had so badly wanted to go to that Twoleg place to search for kittypets that might be interested in joining the Clans, but they'd been lucky when a patrol carving out borders spotted a rogue cat that was nearly starved. And that cat was being cared for right now, yet Ashstar wasn't sure which Clan he'd go to. Maybe RiverClan or ShadowClan, or maybe WindClan or ThunderClan. And that cat was given the name, Ebonyfur, for his thick black fur.

He was in the medicine den with Ashstar, sleeping.

Ashstar limped from his den, watching as the sun was about to set. He limped over to the short stump of the tree that he'd started to have Clan meetings on. "Cats of ThunderClan!" He called. "Please join me for a Clan meeting," He meowed.

His Clan gathered around him, their paws shuffling.

"Today, we will gather at the bottom of the mountain trail," He meowed. "And meet up with WindClan," He announced. "But before we head there, I'd like to announce something. Sootpaw, come stand up here."

Sootpaw's eyes widened. The gray apprentice rushed forward with delight and stopped in front of Ashstar, her eyes shining like bright stars.

"Sootpaw, you have trained hard to understand the ways of the warrior code, and now you shall receive your warrior name," Ashstar meowed. "Sootpaw, do you wish to protect and defend your Clan by the cost of your life?"

"I do," Sootpaw meowed in a proud voice.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, Sootpaw, you shall now be known as Sootwing, StarClan honors your strength and skill," Ashstar purred.

"Sootwing! Sootwing!" The Clan cheered.

"You shall sit vigil tonight," Ashstar told the new warrior. "And I shall pick warriors for the gathering."

"WindClan, ThunderClan, we have gathered here tonight for a special reason," Ashstar called.

Harespring nodded. He looked at Ashstar, his eyes shining. "We've decided that for now, Clan meetings shall be held here until we can find a perfect spot."

Ashstar flicked his tail and twitched his whiskers. The moon was high in the sky, casting long shadows on the ground. Its silvery light turned Ashstar's gray pelt silver. "Jaywing, I'd like you to come up here," He meowed.

Jaywing stared at him, an expression of surprise on her face. As soon as his daughter had padded up beside him, he looked up the mountain trail. He leaned down. "Jaywing, remember that cave we found behind the waterfall?" He whispered.

Jaywing nodded. "Yes," She told him.

Ashstar looked up. "Alderheart, Mothpaw, Kestrelflight, Rabbitpaw, and Harespring," He called. "Follow me," He ordered.

Harespring stared at him. "Where are we going?" He asked, his tail lashing.

Ashstar purred. "You'll see," He meowed.

Jaywing and the others sat in the clearing; they were going to wait for them to come back.

Ashstar padded up the mountain trail, feeling small pointed stones dig into paws. His shadow stretched before him, like it, too, was walking with them to the cave behind the waterfall. The roaring of the waterfall soon blasted in Ashstar's ears. The moon was higher in the sky, its silver light lighting the path ahead of Ashstar. He padded more confidently up the trail.

Finally, he reached the waterfall and saw the skinny path that led under it and behind it. The moon's silver light blasted the water, turning it a silver-white color.

"This is it," Ashstar called to the group.

Harespring padded up to stand beside him. His eyes caught the path and he followed it, where it snaked behind the waterfall.

Ashstar padded forward on the small path, feeling the light spray of the waterfall. He ducked under the water and then went behind it, stepping into the glowing cave. It was beautiful now. The cave was drenched in silver light, and the moss and small puddles glowed.

Harespring stepped in the cave, staring around in awe. The others padded in, and they, too, seemed surprised.

"It must have a connection to StarClan!" Alderheart gasped, his eyes reflecting the silver light.

"Indeed it does," A voice meowed.

They all turned to see a faded flame-colored cat. He padded towards them, his green eyes shining. It was Firestar.

Stars twinkled around his pelt and paws. Firestar stepped forward. "This is the place for StarClan," He meowed. "I'm glad you found it, Ashstar," Firestar purred.

Ashstar dipped his head. "Greetings, Firestar," He meowed.

"Harespring's 9 lives ceremony must begin," Firestar meowed.

"Kestrelflight, stay with him. The rest of you, go."

Mothpaw looked hurt. "But what about me? Sootwing got her warrior name! Why can't I have my full medicine cat name?"

Firestar didn't flinch. "Tonight, it is not half-moon, but tomorrow night is," He meowed. "Mothpaw, you must wait, your ceremony is a lot different than other ceremonies," He told her, his pelt starting to fade.

Mothpaw stared at him, her amber eyes glowing, her ears twitching. "I'm sorry," She muttered.

Ashstar tapped Harespring's shoulder lightly with his tail. "It's time for your ceremony," He meowed. "And then you can become a real Clan leader."

Arthur's Note Lol

Hey guys! Enjoying the story so far? I'm glad that my story already has 1.7k reads, and I never thought that that much people would ever read this story! Thanks for your help! I probably won't post another chapter tomorrow because tomorrow is April 1st, and that's my birthday! Tomorrow is also Easter, and I'll be very busy, like doing stuff with my family and celebrating my birthday. I've been in a rush to get all these chapters done because I knew you guys were bored. If you find any mistakes in my chapters, please let me know, because I don't really read over my story.

A picture of my cat, Oreo!

[image]

Yeah I took this picture back in 2017, on Christmas.

Chapter 50 Allegiances

[image]

(That's a pretty good drawing on the laptop!)

ThunderClan:

Leader- Ashstar

Deputy- Stoneheart

Medicine Cats- Alderheart and Mothstripe

Warriors:

Graystripe- apprentice, Fluffypaw

Squirrelflight- apprentice, Firepaw

Cinderheart

Mossheart

Sorreltail

Ivypool

Bramblehawk

Rowandust

Sootwing

Apprentices:

Firepaw

Fluffypaw

Queens:

Jaywing- Mother to Graystripe's kits(Snowkit, Slatekit, Amberkit, and Thistlekit)

Cats that are staying with them for a little bit:

Rust(The soon-to-be leader of ShadowClan)

Flower(The soon-to-be leader of RiverClan)

Ebonyfur- Tom with thick black fur and green eyes(Used to be rogue)

Pinepaw- Brown tom(Kittypet name- Pine)

Sappaw-Light brown she-cat(Kittypet name- Sap)

The thing is, the kittypets are staying with ThunderClan for a while and will leave to join another Clan once they've decided what Clan they want to join.

WindClan:

Leader- Harestar- apprentice, Dovepaw

Deputy- Gorsetail- apprentice, Eaglepaw

Medicine cats- Kestrelflight- apprentice, Rabbitpaw

Warriors:

Tawnypelt- apprentice, Fernpaw

Apprentices:

Rabbitpaw

Fernpaw

Dovepaw

Eaglepaw

Twoleg place:

Snap(Kittypet)

Ash(Kittypet)

Ice(Kittypet)

Lance(Kittypet)

Cookie(Kittypet)

Silk(Rogue)

Vally(Rogue)

Kindle(Rogue)

Burn(Rogue)

Chapter 50

[image]

Ashstar blinked in the misty forest. They had been living here for two moons now, and it still didn't feel right.

Mothstripe was pacing outside the medicine den, her tail lashing.

Ashstar got to his paws and padded up to her. "What's wrong?" He asked.

"I've been waiting for Alderheart to come back," Mothstripe muttered. "He's in the forest searching for some herb spots," She meowed. "So far, we've only found the place for catmint," She meowed.

All of a sudden, paw steps sounded through the camp entrance, and Alderheart appeared, shaking leaves from his pelt. He some green herbs in his mouth. "I've found horsetail!" He meowed.

Mothstripe turned towards him as he ran towards the two cats. "Nice," She meowed. Her amber eyes glowed. "Well, go put it in the store and we'll both go out together to search for herbs," She meowed.

Rowandust crossed the clearing. He had a nick in his ear that was bleeding. "Can Mothstripe take a look at this?" He asked.

"I'll be right there!" Alderheart mewed.

"No, I said *Mothstripe*," Rowandust growled. "Mothstripe can you take a look at my ear, please?" He asked.

"Yes," Mothstripe purred. She lifted her head to examine his ear,

and her paw lightly touched his ear tip, where the nick was.

"Just as I'd thought, It's infected," Mothstripe sighed. She winked at him. "Come into my den," She purred.

Ashstar looked at them weirdly. Why were they acting like that? He turned away to go to the nursery and found Jaywing washing herself while her kits tumbled around her, chasing each other's tails. "Jaywing, I'd like for you to go and talk to Mothstripe for a moment," He meowed.

Jaywing's eyes widened. "What? Why?" She asked.

"I just think you should," Ashstar muttered.

Jaywing got to her paws, her tail lashing. "Why? There's something you aren't telling me!" She growled.

"Ok," Ashstar growled. "Mothstripe and Rowandust are acting strange every time they see each other. Mothstripe winked at him, and Rowandust only wanted Mothstripe to treat his wound," He explained.

Jaywing lashed her tail. "What does she think she's doing?" She growled.

Mothstripe purred as she watched Rowandust. The tom was so handsome.

Paw steps stomped outside the medicine den, and Jaywing, who was bristling, came up to Mothstripe. She had never seen her mother look so mad. "What is it? Is there something you want?" She asked calmly.

"Come with me, Mothstripe," Jaywing meowed in a strange way, as if trying to sound calm.

Mothstripe looked at her mother and got to her paws. As they walked through the camp entrance, Mothstripe turned to her mother. "What's wrong?" She asked.

Jaywing ignored her and continued walking. They stumbled over

roots and brambles and pushed past bushes and trees and finally made it to a clearing where a huge tree rested at the center. The tree had huge branches that curled out so far that they touched the other trees' leaves. The sun shone up above, giving warmth to Mothstripe's pelt. The river rushed behind the tree. *If only I could sleep here with Rowandust...*

Jaywing sat down behind the tree, and Mothstripe went to join her. She looked in the river, seeing her reflection and the tree's reflection. Her reflection was breaking apart as the river sped past.

"Mothstripe," Jaywing sighed. "You don't know how much trouble you're getting yourself into," She meowed, her tail touching, Mothstripe's shoulder.

Mothstripe was confused at first.

"I know you know what I'm talking about! You're having a little crush on Rowandust, and you should know that medicine cats can't take mates," She growled.

Mothstripe flinched. "How did you find out?" She gasped.

"Ashstar saw you," Jaywing growled. "And don't think I haven't seen the way you stare at him," She growled.

Mothstripe bristled. "But it's not fair! I want to raise a family! I want to have kits of my own! You have kits! It isn't fair!" She cried.

Jaywing stared at her desperately. "Mothstripe, it is fair. You're a medicine cat and you know that you'd be breaking the warrior code if you had kits!" She growled. "I don't want you to get in trouble... I'm afraid for you!" She cried.

Mothstripe glared at her mother. "I don't care," She growled. Then she turned away, feeling like crying. "I-I never wanted to be a medicine cat, but I was forced to," She growled. "That wasn't fair."

Jaywing stared at her. "I..."

"You'd never understand," Mothstripe growled. "What's done is done, and I can't go back and change my destiny. I'm already a full

medicine cat and I'd suck at warrior training. I'd be no use. So that's why I'm wanting to have kits right now. I'd still be a medicine cat, I'd still be helpful."

"But if you have kits as a medicine cat, you'd be no use! Your attention would be on your kits all the time, instead of having it on injured cats!" Jaywing growled.

Mothstripe's eyes widened and she flinched. She sniffed. "So? We have Alderheart! He's use!" She flashed back at her mother.

Jaywing took a step closer. "Mothstripe, you don't understand. You can't do that!"

Mothstripe unsheathed her claws. "No, you don't understand!" She yowled. She then leaped on her mother, her claws digging into her shoulder. She felt the blood well between her claws.

Jaywing then pushed Mothstripe backward with a strong force that knocked her back towards the river. She tumbled backwards and slid into the river, but she lashed out quickly and held onto the side.

Jaywing quickly got to her paws and leaped towards her, but the muddy ground made Mothstripe slip and tumble into the river.

Mothstripe's fur was instantly soaked and her lungs were screaming for air. Bubbles came from her mouth as she gasped and accidently swallowed water. Rocks jutted out beside her, and her head hit the sharp edge of the rock. Blood floated to the surface of the water, forming a red cloud.

A yowl sounded above the surface of the water, but it was muffled. "M..oth...st..tipe!"

Mothstripe unsheathed her claws and tried to climb up and out of the water, but before she could, a big rock came into her path and everything went black.

Jaywing put her paws on Mothstripe's chest, trying to get the water to come from her chest. "Wake up! Mothstripe! Please!" She cried. Her tail swished over the ground. She gasped for air, like she

couldn't breathe. She then thought about her kits back at camp, in the nursery. They were hungry. They would starve without food. They still weren't old enough for prey. But Mothstripe was more important right now. *I'm not leaving her side*.

Mothstripe twitched.

Jaywing gasped. She put her paws on her daughter again and began pumping.

Mothstripe then coughed up a stream of water and her eyes twitched open. She let her head fall back and hit the grass. She looked at Jaywing. "I'm sorry," She whispered. "I was so stupid," She growled.

"You weren't stupid," Jaywing sobbed. She curled up around Mothstripe, trying to warm her up. "I just worry for you."

Mothstripe smiled weakly. "Thank you," She whispered.

Jaywing weakly purred. She rested her head on Mothstripe's shoulder. "Don't ever think of having your own kits," She meowed.

"I won't," Mothstripe meowed, even though there was a glint in her amber eyes. She closed them and yawned.

"We can rest here if you want," Jaywing offered.

Mothstripe didn't respond, she just fell into the darkness of sleep, her tail-tip twitching occasionally.

Jaywing purred and also fell asleep, the sunlight finally getting at the right angle to come and warm her back. Darkness clouded her vision.

Chapter 51

[image]

Amberkit stumbled over Ashstar's paws. Ashstar purred. Jaywing's new kits were so cute. Jaywing licked the top of Thistlekit's head.

Mothstripe padded from the medicine den, a patch of cobwebs on her forehead.

Rowandust was sitting across camp. He glared at Mothstripe. They must of made up....

Mothstripe looked at him, pain in her eyes, but Rowandust ignored the fact that she was still suffering from them not being able to love each other. Rowandust walked towards her though, and then they both walked from camp.

Ashstar crept toward the camp entrance and stalked through the thick undergrowth, following their scent trails and keeping out of the wind, almost like he was hunting prey or something.

Rowandust's tail flicked as he and Mothstripe walked through the undergrowth, stepping over vines and twisted tree roots.

Ashstar followed them as they walked towards a clearing. His heart beat faster. He'd have to show himself, since there was no undergrowth. He shook thorns and leaves from his pelt and stalked around the clearing, keeping to the shade and undergrowth. He watched them still.

Rowandust flicked his tail and Mothstripe followed him under a large tree with four large branches that looked like they were reaching for the other trees. That tree reminded him of the tree that was in the lake territory.

The river lay behind that tree, and pink blossoms from the tree gently floated down to the river. Rowandust and Mothstripe sat by the river and watched the blossoms land on the water's surface.

"I wish we could...." Mothstripe began, "Be together." Her tail swished.

Rowandust closed his eyes. "I'm sorry for glaring at you like that in camp," He meowed. "I wanted every cat to think I hated you, but I personally don't hate you, I love you," He meowed. He swished his tail to hers, and their tails entwined together.

"I was thinking about running away," Mothstripe meowed. "Having our own kits," She purred.

Ashstar lashed his tail and unsheathed his claws and sprang from the undergrowth. His claws dug into the fur of Rowandust's tail.

Rowandust bristled and jumped to his paws, glaring at Ashstar.

"Why would you betray your Clan like that?" Ashstar growled. "You should know by now that the Clans are suffering with the loss of many cats," He pointed out.

Rowandust unsheathed his claws. "I'm not betraying my Clan! Clearly I'm trying to get more kits for the Clan," He meowed.

"Really? Then why are you running away?" Ashstar taunted. "I gave you your warrior name, I even gave your dead brother a warrior name to make you feel happy," He muttered.

Rowandust dug his claws into the ground. "I know that," He growled. "But this... This isn't fair," He turned to Mothstripe. "Why can't I be with the one cat I love?" He asked.

Ashstar glared at him. "Because she's a medicine cat! Medicine cats can't have kits and you know that," He meowed. He felt strange inside him, like he wanted to rip Rowandust to shreds. *But I can't do that...*

Mothstripe had tears streaming down her face. She then leaped over the large river, catching herself on a rock that stuck out of the water. She then bunched her muscles and leaped to the other side, but slipped on the wet grass. She caught herself with her claws and clawed up the slope, looking back.

Ashstar looked up at her. "Mothstripe! What are you doing?" He asked.

The golden she-cat ran up the slope and into the bushes, her fluffy golden tail disappearing.

Rowandust's eyes were filled with hate. "I know your back story," He growled. "You killed so many cats. You even killed the leader before you just to become leader of this Clan, and my brother's death is all your fault!" He growled with tears in his eyes. "During that flood, we had to stay because of you, and me and my littermates got lost and you never thought to send a search party!" He cried.

Ashstar stared at him. "I did," He growled.

"He drowned," Rowandust growled, "I should've known that you wouldn't come after us."

Ashstar looked at him.

Rain started to pour down lightly and dark clouds rolled across the sky, making the last ray of sunlight die away.

"Then leave if you think I'm a terrible leader," Ashstar hissed. "You just don't know what I've been through," He meowed. *Wolffang....Softpaw....Bunnypelt*....He thought, *I lost them, and he has no idea what it's like to lose three of your kits*!

Rowandust looked at him through narrow eyes, his eyes thin slits. He then unsheathed his claws and leaped on Ashstar. "I'll protect the rest of my family from you! And my Clanmates!"

Ashstar easily leaped to one side and watched as Rowandust hit the earth hard with his face. He stood, panting, blood dripping from his nose. He shook dust and dirt from his pelt and charged at Ashstar.

Ashstar was knocked off his paws and was thrown into a tree. He unsheathed his claws as Rowandust came near. The golden warrior pinned him against the tree but wouldn't loosen his grip on Ashstar even when he slashed at his arms and muzzle.

Rowandust looked at him, a fire burning in his eyes. Blood welled on the scratches on his muzzle and red stained his golden pelt.

Ashstar panted hard. His attacks were getting weaker as he quickly ran out of energy.

"You sick cat," Rowandust hissed. "I thought you were stronger than that!" He raised a paw and brought it down to Ashstar's head.

Ashstar screeched with pain and felt dizzy, but he knew he couldn't stand like this. He kicked Rowandust's belly and watched him roll over in the dirt. He padded up to him and sunk his claws into his shoulder. Blood dripped into Ashstar eyes. He felt his head injury burn, and his vision got blurrier with every second.

Rowandust turned over. "Thought you'd kill me like that? Try again," He growled. He sprang up and slashed at Ashstar's throat.

Ashstar dodged his attacks, but got more tired each time. He then decided it was his turn. He lashed out at Rowandust's ears, slicing them. Blood sprayed the ground. He leaped on Rowandust and sunk his teeth into his scruff.

Rowandust fought back, lashing out at Ashstar's shoulders.

Blood stained Ashstar's gray pelt. He lifted Rowandust into the air and threw him by the river, hoping he would fall in and get carried down stream, but Rowandust twisted in the air and landed on all fours, his claws sinking into the earth. "You'll to try a little harder than that!" He hissed.

Ashstar charged forward and leaped at Rowandust. *I'll trick him...*

Rowandust ducked under him and got back on his paws and then charged at Ashstar his claws ready to slash his face. But Ashstar didn't think that would happen. Rowandust pinned Ashstar to the ground, and smiled. He raised a paw. "Say goodbye!" He yowled.

Ashstar then struck his paw up, his claws hitting Rowandust's throat. Blood leaped on Ashstar's face. Rowandust's paws shook as he backed off of Ashstar, blood dripping from the gash in his throat. "Hahaha...." He laughed. He held his paw to the gash, blood staining

his claws and the fur around his pads. Blood drizzled from his mouth. He panted and gasped for air.

"You thought you'd kill me that way, didn't you?" He growled, his eyes turning dull. "You thought wrong," He meowed, panting. He stumbled over to the river and bunched his muscles, getting ready to leap across the river. "I can't be stopped. No cat will stop me from becoming Mothstripe's mate," He growled. He turned to face Ashstar.

Ashstar's heart beat faster as he saw his face. His amber golden eyes reflected a burning fire and it was like he could see into the golden warrior's mind; Blood and water mixing together and the cries for help.

"I...." Ashstar began. "I know that," He meowed. He lashed his tail, his vision blurring and everything slowly around him getting covered by shadows. Every second he stared into those amber eyes, his pain deepened and he heard the screams for help getting louder and a picture started to form in his mind; a brown cat stared at the large wave that was heading towards him, his blue eyes widened and his fur bristling. He was frozen in shock. "Move! Out of the way! Hawkpaw!" Rowandust was coming into the picture now, but that was Rowanpaw back then. The large wave crashed over the cat and blackness swamped the picture. It soon blurred into colors and became clear. The brown cat, looking lifeless now, had water soaking his soft brown fur, his blue eyes dull and water leaking from his mouth. Then Rowanpaw came into view. He crouched over the lifeless brown cat. "No! Please wake up! I need you! Don't die! Brother please!" He cried. He looked around, his eyes widened and filled with pain. "Help! Somebody please help! Hawkpaw needs help!" He cried into the darkness. "Help!"

The vision then blurred and Ashstar was back in reality.

Rowandust smiled, yet pain and anger filled his eyes. "See, you understand now, that's why I'm trying to show you my pain. And Mothstripe makes me happy. She's the only one that understands my pain," He muttered.

"I never heard a single cry that night of the flood," Ashstar mewed.

"I cried for help," Rowandust growled. "But nobody came." And with that, he leaped onto the rock that was in the middle of the river, and then leaped to the other side. He was gone, leaving behind a trail of dark blood.

Ashstar stumbled to the side of the river, looking at his reflection. He gasped. His eyes were black with blue slits and his ears were torn along with scars across his muzzle and eyes. Blood stained his face and dripped from his whiskers. He shook his head and looked at his reflection again, seeing that it was back to normal. *What's wrong with me....*

His vision turned black as he felt dizzy, then he collapsed on the side of the river. Sleep...

Chapter 52

[image]

Mothstripe stiffened as the bushes rustled behind her. She turned to see Rowandust, all bloody and battered, stumble towards her. Mothstripe hurried forward tp his side, her shoulder holding him up.

"Rowandust, you're hurt!" She cried. She backed away from him to look at his wounds, from ears to tail.

Rowandust put his paw on the gash in his throat. Blood stained his mouth and his ears were shredded with dried blood. He looked down at the ground, seeing that blood dripped from his throat wound. "H-hurt? It's nothing," He panted.

"Nothing? You're going to bleed to death!" Mothstripe panted.

"I know, you can't save me," Rowandust growled, his amber eyes dulling. He fell to the ground, blood pooling around him. "T-tell my kits about me...."

Mothstripe stared at him, not knowing what to do for a second, like her mind was blank with no knowledge of healing.

"Tell my kits stories about me," He coughed, blood trickling from his mouth. His amber eyes shone. "Don't let them trust Ashstar, just train them to be viscous warriors, strong enough to take on the whole of ThunderClan, let them kill those weak cats with no mercy," He muttered. His eyes closed.

Mothstripe bristled. "D-don't die!" She mewed. "I can't live out here without you! I don't know how to hunt, or fight or..."

"You can do it, just don't you dare go back to Ashstar," Rowandust growled. "He's going to kill you once you get back."

"No he wouldn't! You can't kill medicine cats!" Mothstripe growled.

"He killed a medicine cat once. Her name was Leafpool," Rowandust coughed, his voice echoing.

"How do you know all this?" Mothstripe growled.

"The Dark Forest. I've been training with Wolffang and others, like Hawkfrost," Rowandust meowed. "They told me everything about Ashstar," He meowed. "So don't go back to Ashstar, just leave everything and everyone behind and give birth to your kits."

Mothstripe felt a sharp pain pricking her heart, like a cat's claw was cutting into her with force. "No!" She cried. "I won't leave my Clan behind! I won't leave behind the Clan that was so nice to me! I won't leave behind Alderheart, Jaywing, my sister, and my friends! I can't even believe I trusted you, I can't even believe how stupid I am, I couldn't see past you," She muttered. She stood up now, her fur ruffled by the wind. "So I'm..... I'm going back."

"You filthy traitor! I should've known," Rowandust growled. He then clenched his teeth and weakly stood to his paws. "I should've killed you!" He lashed out at her throat.

Mothstripe jumped back from his attack and rushed forward to knock him onto his side.

Rowandust rolled over until his body slapped into the pool of his blood.

The metallic smell bathed Mothstripe's tongue. She unsheathed her claws and put her paw on Rowandust's head; she could feel blood welling between her claws.

Rowandust's amber eyes flashed. He then lashed out, his claws fully extended.

The blow took Mothstripe off-guard and Rowandust's claws hit her paw. Blood trickled from the wound, but it had also stretched Rowandust's wound.

Rowandust jerked away as blood spilled from the gash in his throat,

pooling all around him. His eyes dulled and his body jerked.

Mothstripe stared at him and watched as he was on the edge of dying.

Then Rowandust lay still, blood staining the grass around him.

Mothstripe backed away from him, her paws feeling frozen. She limped away from him and went down the slope. She pushed her way through the bushes and limped farther down the slope, seeing the river as it rushed ahead of her. She gasped as she saw Ashstar collapsed on the ground in front of the large blossom tree that faced the river. She limped down the slope and prepared herself to jump across the river.

She bounded over to Ashstar and prodded him in the side with her paw. "Ashstar! Please wake up!"

Ashstar jerked awake, bristling, his claws unsheathed. "Traitor!" He growled, pushing Mothstripe back.

"N-no, wait!" Mothstripe stammered, her paws shaking. "I-I've come back! I want to join your Clan again!" She cried.

Suspicion glittered in Ashstar's eyes.

"Oh come on..." Mothstripe sighed. "What harm can I do?"

"What if Rowandust is hiding in those bushes up there?" He asked. "And you're talking to me for a distraction?" He whipped around and started to pad away.

Mothstripe stared after him. She flattened her ears and started to pad towards him. "Rowandust is dead, Ashstar," She growled. The leaves overhead slowly drifted down like a feather, and birds called out to each other in the trees. "He's dead, I.... I think I somehow killed him," She meowed.

Ashstar's whiskers twitched. "Sure about it? Why do you always have doubt in yourself?" Ashstar asked. "You always stammer and you're always so.... unsure about everything," He growled.

Mothstripe realized he was right. "But please trust me! R-Rowandust is dead!" She mewled.

"Alright I believe you," Ashstar meowed. "Just keep following me back to camp," He meowed.

They padded through the forest, a hill ahead of them, and beyond that hill, the tall mountain stretched, the purple-pink sky beyond that. Shadows were beginning to creep up to the cats. The trees stretched tall, like trying to reach the sky.

"What happened?" Ashstar asked, without turning his head. His whiskers twitched and his fur blew in the wind.

Mothstripe then started to explain to him what had happened to Rowandust; how he died.

Ashstar stared at her. "Huh, must be tough for you, now that you're expecting his kits," He sighed.

They were at the top of the hill, now looking down at the slope that had the trail leading to camp. They padded down the slope and started to walk on the trail, ferns, vines, and twisted roots getting in their way.

"I just sometimes wonder what would've happened," Ashstar began. "If you could've listened to your mother," He sighed.

Mothstripe didn't want to reply, in fact she wondered that too. *What if? What if? What if.....*

Allegiances for Chapter 53

[image]

'\(0_0)/'

ThunderClan:

Leader: Ashstar- Gray tom with a half right ear and a scar on his shoulder

Deputy: Stoneheart- Dark gray tom with yellow eyes

Medicine cats: Alderheart- Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Mothstripe- Pretty golden she-cat with a long, fluffy tail

Warriors:

Squirrelflight- Dark flame-colored she-cat with one white paw- apprentice, Firepaw

Graystripe- Dark gray tom with yellow eyes, apprentice, Fluffypaw

Cinderheart- Dappled smoky-gray she-cat

Jaywing- Gray she-cat with blue eyes

Mossheart- Light sliver she-cat with green eyes and black patches on her pelt- apprentice, Thistlepaw

Sorreltail- Tortoiseshell and white she-cat- apprentice, Slatepaw

Ivypool- Silver and white tabby she-cat

Bramblehawk- Brown tom with amber eyes and black stripes- apprentice, Amberpaw

Sootwing- Gray she-cat, apprentice- Snowpaw

Apprentices:

Fluffypaw- Fluffy white and brown she-cat with green eyes

Firepaw- Flame-colored tom with a thick pelt

Thistlepaw- Gray and orange she-cat with strange purple eyes

Amberpaw- Ginger colored she-cat with amber eyes and a white belly

Slatepaw- Light gray she-cat with black paws

Snowpaw- White tom

Queens:

(Cinderheart might be here soon)

WindClan:

Leader: Harestar

Deputy: Gorsetail

Medicine cats: Kestrelflight- apprentice, Rabbitpaw

Warriors:

Tawnypelt- apprentice, Fernpaw

Doveclaw

Eaglefeather

Apprentices:

Rabbitpaw

Fernpaw

So, this is RiverClan, but when Flower gets ready, and also ShadowClan when Rust gets ready...So that means that they aren't leading the Clan right now, but they're planning to. And also I'll list the kittypets that will join their Clan. Also, Tawnypelt will join ShadowClan again because she will train Rust to be a ShadowClan cat, and then Rust will pass on those skills to the kittypets that join his Clan.... Graystripe will go to RiverClan and train Flower, Pinepaw, and Sappaw... Hope you understand that! (And all the cats listed down below are currently still in ThunderClan) '\(0_0)/'

RiverClan:

Leader: Flower- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Cats:

Pinepaw

Sappaw

ShadowClan:

Leader: Rust- Dark ginger tom with green eyes and shredded ears

Cats:

Ebonyfur- Tom with thick black fur

Chapter 53

[image]

"Thistlepaw, your mentor will be Mossheart. Mossheart, you shall pass on all your warrior knowledge to this apprentice and train them well," Ashstar meowed.

Mossheart excitedly touched her nose to the little cat's nose. "I will, Ashstar," She meowed. "I'll protect you, little one," She whispered.

Thistlepaw's little strange purple eyes shone and then she closed them. "And I'll be the best warrior!" She whispered.

"Slatepaw! Amberpaw! Snowpaw! Thistlepaw!" The Clan cheered.

"Tonight we also have a gathering!" Ashstar called. "And I'll be taking Jaywing, Cinderheart, Mossheart, Bramblehawk, Ivypool, Sootwing, Fluffypaw, and Firepaw. Flower and Rust, you'll also come, since you need experience of a Gathering," Ashstar meowed.

"Gatherings sound exciting!" Flower meowed.

"Yeah, from what I heard from my Clanmates," Rust meowed.

Bramblehawk bristled at the word 'Clanmates'

"We shall be leaving in a little while," Ashstar meowed.

Jaywing was eating a piece of fresh-kill with her mate, Graystripe. She licked her paw and drew it over her head.

"I can't wait to go to the Gathering!" Fluffypaw mewled.

"It'll be so exciting!" Firepaw meowed, his fur fluffing up.

Ivypool and Stoneheart watched them, purring. They rubbed their muzzles together.

"Ashstar should've let our kits go," Graystripe sighed.

"They'd be bouncing around all over camp until they have no energy," Jaywing purred.

Stoneheart then coughed.

Jaywing bristled, horror pricking her pelt. She then walked over to her brother.

Stoneheart crouched on the ground, Ivypool beside him, she lay her head on his back.

"Stoneheart, are you ok?" Jaywing asked. "You coughed."

Stoneheart looked up. "I don't really feel good," He meowed.

Jaywing ran to the medicine den. She padded into the medicine den, brambles swishing behind her. "Mothstripe!" She meowed.

Mothstripe turned towards her. Her pelt was ruffled. It had been two moons since Ashstar had brought Mothstripe back.

"Mothstripe, what's wrong?" She asked.

Mothstripe turned away from her. "Nothing," She muttered.

Jaywing stared at her daughter. Her pelt was ruffled as if it hadn't been groomed in days. "Stoneheart coughed and he said he doesn't feel good. I think he might be sick; could you go and check?" Jaywing asked.

Still, Mothstripe didn't turn to look at her. Her pelt seemed so dull, almost like she was a ghost. She twitched occasionally. "Get Alderheart to check him," She meowed. "I'm....busy," She meowed.

Jaywing was about to get Alderheart, who was sitting near Ashstar's den, but she was suspicious about her daughter. "Busy? What are you doing?"

"Nothing. Sorting.....herbs," Mothstripe stammered. "Leave me alone," She growled. "Don't let Stoneheart stay sick if he is, just go get Alderheart."

"Something's wrong," Jaywing meowed. "Mothstripe-"

"Get Alderheart!" Mothstripe growled. "Leave me alone!"

Jaywing backed away from the den. "O-ok, If that makes you happy," She meowed, turning away from her daughter. She saw Alderheart sitting at the prey pile now. She padded over to him. "Alderheart! Could you check on Stoneheart? He said he doesn't feel too good, and he coughed."

Horror glittered in Alderheart's eyes. He padded past her and ran over to where Stoneheart was. He put his paw to the deputy's head.

Jaywing ran over to him. Ivypool stared at Stoneheart, her eyes widened. "I-is he ok?" She asked. "Stoneheart, please don't be sick!"

Alderheart's eyes widened. "Oh no! This isn't good!" He mewled. "He's warm, and he's sick," Alderheart pointed out. "We haven't found any herbs for sickness!"

"We've only found poppy seeds and catmint though, right?" Jaywing prompted.

"We *did* have catmint, until some animal came by the place where it grew and ate it!" Alderheart growled. "We only have a few stalks left! And that's nothing compared to this cough he has," Alderheart muttered. "We don't have any other herbs for this kind of stuff; we haven't found anything out here!"

"Treat him with all you have!" Ivypool meowed.

Jaywing looked at her. "Alderheart's going to try that," She meowed. She looked at him, hoping that he'd have a look of hope in his eyes, but his eyes were dull.

"Don't let him die, please, StarClan," Jaywing whispered. She padded away from Alderheart, going back to the medicine den. She found Mothstripe there. "Mothstripe, after the Gathering, can you

come into the forest with me to hunt for some herbs? Like catmint? Or any herb that can treat a sickness?" She asked.

Mothstripe didn't turn around.

Jaywing padded up to her daughter, her paws prickling. "Mothstripe," She whispered.

Mothstripe- as soon as Jaywing's paw touched her shoulder- turned around, her eyes blazing with pain and fear and anger. *This wasn't Mothstripe....she's never acted this way...*

Jaywing's pelt bristled. Her daughter looked scared....like she was afraid of someone or something.

"Mothstripe-"

"ThunderClan! It's time for tonight's gathering!" Ashstar's voice rang outside.

Jaywing looked at her daughter. She breathed hard, her amber eyes glowing like a small orange flame in the dark. Jaywing turned away from her and headed outside, padding to where all the chosen cats stood.

"Tonight, our deputy Stoneheart could not make it because he got sick," Ashstar announced. "But we hope he gets well enough for the next days to come," He meowed.

Harestar dipped his head and closed his eyes. "WindClan has two new warriors. Dovepaw and Eaglepaw have now become Doveclaw and Eaglefeather. WindClan shall mourn Bunnypelt's death tonight, Ashstar," He added, looking at Ashstar.

Ashstar glanced at him. "Thank you, Harestar," He meowed.

"I respect Bunnypelt," Harestar added.

Ashstar looked at him. "I think that's all for tonight," He meowed. "ThunderClan, we shall start heading home!"

"Stoneheart!" A voice meowed.

Alderheart ran over to the medicine den, his paws skidding on small rocks.

Ivypool was in the medicine den, but Mothstripe was not. Ivypool's fur was ruffled. She crouched over Stoneheart. Alderheart's heart felt like a stone as he saw their two kits, Firepaw and Fluffypaw, standing in the entrance, hanging back and watching their father suffer.

Stoneheart coughed violently, and he looked and sounded as if he couldn't breathe.

Alderheart ran over to them and touched Ivypool's shoulder lightly with his tail. "Ivypool, fetch some wet moss for me," He told her.

Ivypool quickly got up and ran out of the medicine den.

Alderheart crouched over Stoneheart, putting his paw on his head. The deputy felt warm. "Stoneheart," He muttered gently. Alderheart pushed a stem of catmint towards him. "Eat that."

Stoneheart opened his eyes; they were a dull yellow and they looked glassy. He slowly moved his paw to push the herb into his mouth. Then he ate it and wrinkled his nose, but swallowed it anyway.

Alderheart hoped he'd be ok. He looked up to see Firepaw and Fluffypaw trembling in the entrance of the den. "He's ok, don't worry about him, go back to your duties," Alderheart called to them.

"Are you sure?" Firepaw asked.

"I'm sure," Alderheart told them, although he hated to lie to them.

Ivypool pushed past them, dripping moss in her jaws, and padded over to Alderheart. She set the moss by Stoneheart's jaws so he could lick the water.

"Thanks," Alderheart praised the she-cat.

She crouched down by her mate once more, resting her head on his

shoulder.

"Ivypool, let Stoneheart rest. You might get sick as well," Alderheart meowed.

Ivypool didn't move.

"Watch over him while I'm out," Alderheart sighed. "I have to do something."

Author's Note

Hey guys! Sorry that chapter was so late! I flew to Ohio(I'm 13) with my family to see my cousin graduate on Friday, and it was on Saturday. It was great, but it was also pretty cold outside because the graduation was held in a stadium that was outside. We were going home on Sunday, but then when we were on the plane, the attendents told us to get off. Turns out, the luggage cart hit the plane's wing. We were waiting for someone to come and check it, but it was taking forever, and we would miss our connections, so we went to Gate A12 and checked if they knew anything. There was a flight that went to Atlanta at 4:35, and that was our only option. We literally had to wait for four hours, which sucked, and the plane was very large so it took forever for everyone to get off. We flew to Atlanta and had to wait another hour for another plane, and when we got to the Columbia airport, we found our car and started to drive home. It took an hour, and when we got there, it was 10:26, and we immediately got in bed because me and my sis had school. Well, end of story!

Chapter 54

Ashstar left the medicine den, leaving Stoneheart to rest. He climbed up on the High Ledge, looking out over his Clan. Wind ruffled his fur. Closing his eyes, he remembered that more cats had fallen with green cough. Sorreltail and Ivypool got the sickness, and they joined Stoneheart in the medicine den. Stoneheart was the worst of them all.

Squirrelflight came into camp, a fat mouse in jaws. Her apprentice, Firepaw, trotted by her side, looking grim; he had a small sparrow in his jaws.

Ashstar saw Mothstripe come out of the medicine den. She looked worried. She climbed up the rocks, heading towards Ashstar on High Ledge.

Ashstar turned to face her.

"Ashstar, Stoneheart's not getting better at all, and we've used all the catmint we've had," She explained. "I think we should call a patrol to go and search for some," She meowed.

Ashstar's heart dropped, hearing that his son hadn't been getting better at all. He looked Mothstripe in the eyes. "Good thinking, so maybe I'll call a Clan meeting," He meowed. He turned. "All cats old enough to hunt, join beneath the High Ledge for a Clan meeting!" He called.

Mothstripe stood beside him still.

"Our medicine cats currently have no catmint, so I would like to gather a patrol to search for some. Bramblehawk and Mossheart and me as well shall go," Ashstar explained. He turned to Mothstripe. "Mothstripe, explain to them what catmint looks like," He meowed.

"It's a leafy and delicious-smelling plant and it has a bit like gray-

green leaves," Mothstripe simply explained. It has a hairy stem and purple flowers," She meowed. "It looks a bit like nettles, but it doesn't sting," Mothstripe added. "Be careful and don't confuse it with nettles."

"Thanks," Ashstar meowed to her. "Since Stoneheart is sick, I'd like to pick a cat as deputy to take his place. Squirrelflight, I'd like for you to take over his duties," Ashstar meowed.

Squirrelflight dipped her head. "Alright," She looked at him.

"I'll take my patrol with me now," Ashstar meowed.

Bramblehawk and Mossheart bounded over to him.

"Hairy stem, looks like nettles," Bramblehawk was muttering.

"Ready?" Ashstar asked.

The two warriors nodded.

All of a sudden, Rust and Flower came bounding over.

"Ashstar!" They called.

They stopped at a halt when they reached Ashstar, their pelts neatly groomed, their eyes shining. Flower stepped forward. "We want to help you find catmint," She meowed. Rust stepped beside her.

"Can we?" He asked.

Ashstar sighed inwardly. He couldn't let them not go on this adventure. Plus, they needed a tour of the territory. "Alright, fine, I guess you two can go," He meowed.

"Thanks!" Flower meowed. She looked at him, though. "Ashstar, when will we become apprentices?" She meowed.

"Well, you need to wait," Ashstar meowed.

Flower groaned but was still purring. Rust purred beside her, staring into her eyes.

"Alright, lets go," Ashstar meowed. He took the lead and walked out of the camp entrance, walking along the trail that led towards the hill. Vines and roots instantly swept over the path, almost making Ashstar trip. He walked farther, then as the hill neared, he swerved sideways, cutting into the thick undergrowth. He leaped over bushes and ducked under vines and small branches. After what seemed like forever, he made it to a clearing, seeing the moor in the distance.

The orange sun was beginning to sink in the scarlet sky, and only a few stray clouds doted the sky.

Ashstar led his patrol across the clearing, and more trees came into view. Leaves littered the ground, and the wind started to sweep across the forest. They finally made it to WindClan's border.

"Alright, we can wait for a patrol to come. It shouldn't be that long," Ashstar meowed, glancing at his cats.

"Where are we even heading?" Flower asked.

"To the Twoleg Place," Ashstar meowed, flicking his tail. "Catmint usually grows there," He added.

WindClan scent drifted across the moor, making its way towards Ashstar's group. "I think a patrol is coming," Ashstar muttered.

Sure enough, a WindClan patrol did cross the moor, but they must of scented Ashstar's group because they came walking over to them. Tawnypelt was in the lead, along with her apprentice, Fernpaw, and Doveclaw.

"Hey Ashstar, why are you here?" Tawnypelt asked, dipping her head.

"Three of our cats have caught green cough," Ashstar explained.

"That's terrible," Tawnypelt sighed.

"We were wondering if we could cross the moor to go to Twoleg Place and see if anything was there," Ashstar meowed.

"Well, Fernpaw had just completed his warrior assessment and we were heading back to camp," Tawnypelt explained.

"Oh, that's great," Ashstar purred. WindClan was growing....

"I guess we could escort you to the other side," Tawnypelt meowed.

"Or they could just cross," Doveclaw meowed. "If they have sick cats waiting on them, they should hurry, not waste time talking to us," The gray warrior pointed out, her ear twitching.

Tawnypelt glanced at her. "Well, I guess you're right," She meowed. "Quickly cross the moor, but just cross it, don't do anything else," She meowed.

"Alright," Ashstar meowed.

Crossing the moor was easy, but now, the sun had already sunk down, the moon about to take its place.

The Twoleg Place was just in sight; harsh lights glowed and large nests of red and gray sat in rows. The place was huge, stretching beyond the moor, and beyond it were multiple thunderpaths.

Ashstar braced himself for what they would find. Maybe kittypets looking for trouble...or maybe twolegs that might grab them.

They slipped in between two twoleg nests and made their way into the Twoleg Place. Gray stone stretched under Ashstar's paws as he padded over short grass.

Skinny metal trees with lights on them stretched tall and shone brightly.

Ashstar gazed around nervously. Looks like this was going to be hard....

Chapter 55

The catmint had barely even helped Stoneheart, and now Squirrelflight and Graystripe had fallen ill. Which cat would be strong enough to be deputy? There was Jaywing, and Cinderheart had also had her kits with Ashstar. Ashstar didn't know what to do. With his son sick, he felt that at any moment, he might die.

"Ashstar!" A voice called.

Ashstar got to his paws and padded from his den on High Ledge. He saw Alderheart in the medicine den.

"It's Mothstripe!" He yowled, his amber eyes wide with panic.

Ashstar ran down the rocks and ran towards the medicine den, seeing that Alderheart was now pacing back and forth.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Mothstripe!" Alderheart breathed. "She's having kits!"

Ashstar's breath caught in his throat. *Now*? He looked at Alderheart. "Well don't just stand there! Help her!" He growled.

Alderheart rushed in the den, trying to calm the she-cat down.

Ashstar hated listening to the moans and groans, so he rushed to the Warriors' den, finding Jaywing. She was pawing at her bedding, like she was trying to fix it. She was the only one there.

"Jaywing," Ashstar meowed. "Mothstripe is having her kits," He explained.

Jaywing's eyes widened in panic and she pushed past Ashstar, running towards the medicine den, her pelt bristled and her tail streaming out behind her.

The thought of kits made Ashstar think of Cinderheart, so he was

going to go to the nursery to check on her. He backed out of the Warriors' den and turned sideways and started to make his way to the nursery. He passed the fresh-kill pile and then decided that he'd take some prey to his mate. Ashstar picked a mouse from the pile, then as he turned, he saw Sootwing and Bramblehawk come into camp, a small brown cat between them. The small brown cat was injured, his paw looking twisted and his ears all cut up. His head had a nasty wound on it that looked infected.

"What happened? Who is that?" Ashstar gasped.

"We found him near the river, barely alive. I think he got hit by a monster maybe," Sootwing meowed.

"He's still breathing, so he's still alive," Bramblehawk meowed.

"Oh StarClan, this isn't even the right time to be treating cats!" Ashstar gasped. "Mothstripe is having kits! Alderheart is looking after her!"

The two warriors shifted their paws. "What? Having kits?"

"Yes, but take this cat to the medicine den immediately!" Ashstar told them.

The two warriors held the injured tom against their shoulders, heading towards the medicine den.

Mossheart and her apprentice, Thistlepaw, were looking at them. Mossheart saw Ashstar and padded up to him. "Who's that?" She asked.

"They found him by the river," Ashstar explained. "He must be a rogue or maybe a lost kittypet. But my question is, how did he get so injured like that?" He muttered to himself.

Mossheart heard him. "He probably got hit by a monster, and maybe he dragged himself somewhere, trying to find help, but he probably passed out," She meowed.

"Maybe," Ashstar agreed. "Have you gone out to train your-"

He was cut off by a yowl from the medicine den. Mothstripe probably...

"What was that?" Mossheart gasped.

"Mothstripe."

"Why did she yowl?"

"She's giving birth to her kits," Ashstar explained. He realized that he'd have to explain this to every cat, because no other cat knew about Mothstripe having kits; only Jaywing and Ashstar.

"Who's kits?" Mossheart growled.

"Rowandust's," Ashstar explained.

"What? I thought they broke up!" The black and white she-cat growled. "Didn't Rowandust die?"

"Yeah, but there's no time to explain. I need to check on Cinderheart," Ashstar meowed, losing patience.

Mossheart looked him, blinking.

"Take your apprentice out, if you haven't already," He meowed, then turned away, heading to the nursery, picking his mouse up. He saw Cinderheart and her kits playing around her paws as he neared.

Cinderheart got to her paws to greet him. She licked his shoulder, purring. "Hey, Ashstar," She meowed, dipping her head.

He dropped his mouse in front of her, then rested his chin on her head, purring. Then, another yowl erupted from the medicine den.

"Is that Mothstripe?" Cinderheart asked.

"Yeah, how'd you know?" Ashstar asked.

"Jaywing told me," Cinderheart explained, her blue eyes shining. "Who was that brown tom?"

"Just some stranger a patrol found by the river," Ashstar explained. He looked at his kits.

Moonkit, a little white she-kit was playing with her brother, Smallkit, a tiny yellow tom. And Palekit, a pale gray she-kit, was sleeping in a thick bedding of moss.

"They're so sweet, aren't they?" Cinderheart purred.

Ashstar purred and nodded. "And cute," He added.

"Mothstripe!" Alderheart's voice echoed in the camp.

Ashstar looked at Cinderheart. "Think she's done?" He asked.

"You go and see, I've got to get these kits to sleep," Cinderheart meowed, purring softly, looking Ashstar into the eyes.

He backed away from her, turning to go to the medicine den. He pushed the brambles back and peered inside the den, seeing Mothstripe laying in a moss nest, her kits huddled against her belly, quietly suckling. There was only two kits: a ginger tom and a calico she-cat. Alderheart was in the back, crouching over something. It must of been that brown tom.

"How's Mothstripe?" Ashstar asked.

"She's ok," Alderheart meowed roughly. "But I'm trying to take care of this little fellow," He meowed.

"That little brown tom?" Ashstar prompted.

"Yes," Alderheart answered. "Could you give me some chervil? It's a sweet-smelling plant with large leaves," He explained.

Ashstar padded to the back. He looked over the different herb stacks, and finally his eyes rested on the chervil. He picked it up in his jaws and brought it to Alderheart.

"Thanks," Alderheart meowed. He started to chew the chervil into a poultice, then he spat it out on his paw and rubbed the healing juices on the small brown tom's forehead.

"What does that do?" Ashstar asked.

"Treats infection," Alderheart explained. "Get Jaywing back in here. She needs to watch over Mothstripe while I take care of this cat," He meowed.

"Alright. And I suppose you want me to keep helping you?" He prompted.

"Yes."

Ashstar backed away from the den and spotted Jaywing talking to Cinderheart.

"Jaywing!" Ashstar called. "Alderheart needs you!" He called. He turned and dipped back into the medicine den.

"Find me some cobwebs, it should be a silky wad," Alderheart meowed.

Ashstar quickly found the cobwebs and handed them to Alderheart. The medicine cat wrapped the cobwebs around the tom's twisted paw. He also wrapped some around his cut ears and patted a few on the head wound.

"Now, he should be fine," Alderheart meowed. "He just needs to rest."

The tom's breathing was ragged, yet he seemed to be ok. He shifted in his moss nest a bit.

"Oh Ashstar," A voice behind him meowed.

Ashstar turned to see Jaywing.

"What will you do with him once he wakes up?" She asked. She was sitting beside Mothstripe, who was still asleep.

"I'm not sure," Ashstar meowed. "I haven't thought about that. If he's a kittypet, he could go back to his twolegs," He pointed out.

"True," Jaywing agreed. "But what if he's a rogue? What if he has

nowhere to go once he wakes up?" She asked, her blue eyes wide.

"Well, I'm not sure," Ashstar sighed. "He might want to join the Clan. But if he joined the Clan, he wouldn't be able to become a warrior," Ashstar added.

"You're right. What if he has an interest in medicine cat skills?" Jaywing asked. "Would we take him in?"

"To be a medicine cat's apprentice, you need StarClan's approval, and to reach StarClan, we must go to the MoonCave," Alderheart meowed surprisingly. He padded up to Ashstar's side. "He might not make it up the Mountain Trail, with it being so long. It would take some time, with that injured paw of his," He pointed out.

"You're right," Ashstar agreed, looking at him. "How about we give him a name first, and worry about all of this later, once he wakes up?" He asked. "I was thinking that we name him Twistedpaw."

"Sounds good to me," Alderheart nodded.

"Suits him for that twisted paw of his," Jaywing meowed, her blue eyes shining.

"I'll announce it to the rest of the Clan tomorrow. Right now, we all need to rest," Ashstar pointed out.

"But first, I should check on all the sick cats. I moved them to the elders' den, since no cat was in there," Alderheart meowed. "Jaywing, can you fetch Firepaw and Fluffypaw for me? Tell them to get some wet moss and bring it to the elders' den," He meowed.

Jaywing nodded and dashed off.

"Can I check Stoneheart with you? I'd like to know how he's doing," Ashstar meowed, his paws feeling like stone.

"Sure," Alderheart meowed. He grabbed a few stems of catmint and the two cats headed out. The crossed the clearing, heading towards the elders' den.

Walking beside Alderheart made Ashstar think of the medicine cat's

sister, Sparkpaw, who had died trying to find the old forest. *And I forced her to....*

They arrived at the elders' den. They stepped inside, and a blast of disgusting scents hit Ashstar's nose: The smell of sickness and....death?

"Do you smell that?" Ashstar asked.

Alderheart's eyes widened and his jaw dropped; he stopped dead in his tracks as the herbs fell from his mouth. "No!" He screamed. He dashed to Sorreltail's body, dropping to his paws. "Sorreltail! No! Please, StarClan!" He yowled.

Ashstar raced to the medicine cat's side and saw Sorreltail. Her eyes were closed and her pelt was ruffled. She had foam dripping from her mouth.

"She...she's dead?" Ashstar gasped.

Alderheart's face was buried in her fur.

Paw steps sounded outside the den. Cinderheart came in, her blue eyes widened. She yowled with terror as she saw her dead mother lying on the ground. She pushed past all the other sick cats' bodies and stood beside Sorreltail, panting hard. She buried her face deep into her fur, her tail lashing and her pelt bristling.

Ashstar mind whirled. He put his tail on his mate's shoulders, trying to comfort her, but he knew that wouldn't work.

More cats crowded around outside the medicine den, trying to see Sorreltail.

Ashstar backed away from her dead body and glanced at Stoneheart, who was asleep. Squirrelflight sat up in her nest, along with Ivypool, staring wide-eyed at Sorreltail's dead body. Graystripe was asleep beside Stoneheart, wheezing every time he breathed. Soon enough, the more the cats stayed in here, the worse the sickness would become, and more cats would fall ill, maybe the whole Clan eventually.

Ashstar closed his eyes tightly. Oh please StarClan, he begged silently, what are you doing to us?

Chapter 56

[image]

It had been two moons (two weeks) since Sorreltail's death. Things hadn't been going so well. Stoneheart had gotten worse. Ivypool had recovered though, and was back to her warrior duties. Tawnypelt had also come down early to start training Rust; she was teaching him ShadowClan techniques. She was also training Ebonyfur. Slatepaw was now Ivypool's apprentice.

Alderheart sighed. He pulled the moss out of the river. The dripping moss was in his jaws, and as he turned around, he smelled a strange scent. No other cat was with him. Maybe it was a patrol. The large tree in front of him was bare, all its blossoms had shriveled and fallen off. Leaf-Bare was nearing....

Alderheart continued walking across the clearing, away from the river, but he heard something and stopped.

A figure appeared on the other side of the river, up on the hill. It was a cat. Then another cat stepped out of the bushes beside it. Then another one.

Alderheart's heart stopped. But it was just two cats, right? Or were there more? *Even if I'm not a warrior, I'll still get them out of here*! Rogue scent drifted over Alderheart as the cats padded down the hill. Now he could get a good look at them. One was a big sleek brown tabby tom with tiger stripes and thick fur. His eyes were an amber color. The other cat with him was a cream furred she-cat with amber eyes and a scar on her shoulder. The last cat standing beside the tom was a very small, thin, brown tabby tom with light blue eyes.

Alderheart thought for a moment. They *were* ShadowClan cats! It was Tigerheart and Dawnpelt and Littlecloud!

"Alderheart!" Tigerheart called. He jumped onto the jutting rock in the river and jumped over the water, landing firmly on the bank. He padded up to Alderheart.

"Tigerheart, what are you doing here? How did you find us? I thought you were with the rogues!" Alderheart gasped.

"We were," Tigerheart meowed. "But then we realized what cruel place it was," He meowed. "A new rogue moved there. He was named Darktail, and he brought other rogues with him. To prove his strength, Russetstar told him to kill the one of the deputies," Tigerheart explained.

"Deputies?" Alderheart meowed.

"There's two deputies. Mist and Mud. Mist will take over after Russetstar dies and Mud will take over after Crowstar dies," The brown tom explained. "Darktail decided to fight the strongest deputy. He fought Mud, and if Darktail killed him, he would be deputy and his rogues would join. But if Darktail died, Mud would get to kill all the other rogues in a very brutal way," He meowed, his eyes dark.

"That's terrible," Alderheart growled. "Did Darktail win?" He asked.

"He almost died, but at the last second, he tore out Mud's eyes and throat. It was hard to watch," Tigerheart added. "But Darktail is cruel," He added.

Dawnpelt and Littlecloud jumped across the river to join them.

"How are the Clans? We heard from a kittypet that some large group of cats traveled up the mountain and we figured out that it was you," Dawnpelt meowed.

"I also had visions," Littlecloud added.

"Yes. We traveled through the mountains together and found the Tribe of Rushing Water and asked them if a group of large cats traveled there. The Tribe's leader, Stoneteller, told me that they had found a place beyond the mountains, and he led us there. We were traveling through the forest and I thought I smelled something, so

we went through some bushes to a river and found you," Tigerheart explained.

"The Clans aren't looking too good," Alderheart sighed. "Green cough is spreading through my Clan, and WindClan barely has any warriors to defend itself," He meowed.

"What about RiverClan? Or.... Have you built a new ShadowClan?" Tigerheart asked.

"We're working on it," Alderheart meowed. "Two kittypets, Rust and Flower, are going to be great leaders. Rust is training with Tawnypelt for ShadowClan," He explained. "And Flower is planning to be RiverClan's leader. We found a rogue, Ebonyfur now, and he's also getting trained by Tawnypelt for ShadowClan. There were also two other kittypets, Sappaw and Pinepaw, that are going to join RiverClan. I think Sappaw was going to be a medicine cat there," Alderheart added.

"Wow. Looks like you've all been working hard. Has any cat died yet?" Tigerheart asked.

"Sadly, yes," Alderheart meowed. "Going through the mountains, Bunnypelt died trying to save Dovepaw from falling off the cliff," Alderheart meowed sadly. "And two moons ago, Sorreltail died to green cough."

"That's terrible," Tigerheart meowed. Dawnpelt nodded.

Littlecloud gasped. "Did you say Dovepaw?" He asked.

"Yes. Why ask?" Alderheart asked.

"She was in the rogue camp! She escaped with Eaglepaw. I remember that Crowstar sliced off her ear, and when I tried to treat it, he told me to let her bleed to death," Littlecloud meowed. "Dovepaw and Eaglepaw escaped from the camp, and I never heard of them."

"Dovepaw and Eaglepaw are doing fine. They're in WindClan, and they're Doveclaw and Eaglefeather now," Alderheart meowed.

"That's nice to hear," Littlecloud purred, closing his eyes.

"I should probably take you back to camp," Alderheart meowed. "Ashstar will wonder where I've been, and I need to take care of the sick cats," He pointed out.

"Good. Tawnypelt will be glad to see me and Dawnpelt. And we'd love to help rebuild ShadowClan with you," Tigerheart purred, looking at Dawnpelt and Littlecloud, and then finally looking at Alderheart.

"Alderheart! Where in the name of StarClan have you been?! Stoneheart is worse than before!" Ashstar hissed, his tail lashing and his claws unsheathed.

"I'm sorry Ashstar!" Alderheart meowed, feeling sick all of a sudden. "I...I found three ShadowClan cats!" He explained.

Ashstar took his glare off Alderheart and looked at the three ShadowClan cats. "You three, go wait by my den! Alderheart, get your tail in the elders' den right now!" He hissed.

Alderheart ran past his angry leader and crossed the clearing to where the elders' den was. He then swerved to the medicine den, grabbing the last few stems of catmint. He was going to give all of it to Stoneheart. Then all of a sudden, he tripped over a death berry randomly lying on the ground. The juices were staining the fur around his pads. *I'll wash that later*!

Alderheart ran out of the medicine den and ran to the elders' den, not wanting to waste time. He padded into the den, looking around at his patients. They were all asleep. Alderheart walked over to Stoneheart. He prodded the gray tom in the side with his paw, then he dropped the herbs on the ground, next to his nest.

"Stoneheart, eat these," He pleaded.

Stoneheart's eyes opened slightly. "Close...closer," He muttered. He coughed violently all of a sudden and twitched. Every time he breathed, he wheezed.

Alderheart put his paws on the catmint and pushed it closer to

Stoneheart's jaws. The deputy weakly opened his jaws. Alderheart sunk his claws in the catmint and let them fall into Stoneheart's mouth. Then Alderheart realized that that was the paw with the death berry juices. He yowled in alarm, but before he could take the herbs out of Stoneheart's mouth, it was already too late...

Chapter 57

Stoneheart's eyes flitted open and widened. His jaws parted to scream, but his yowl was muffled by foam forming around his lips. His body jerked wildly and his paws were flailing in the air.

"Stoneheart! No!" Alderheart scrreamed. He did something stupid. He picked up the rest of the catmint and shoved it into Stoneheart's mouth. "Eat it! Hurry!" He screeched.

Squirrelflight got to her paws and stared at Alderheart and Stoneheart. Graystripe got to his paws, mumbling," What's going on?"

Alderheart grabbed wet moss from the corner of the den, and held it up above Stoneheart's jaws. He squeezed the water into the gray tom's mouth. Stoneheart still flailed and jerked wildly.

"Stoneheart! Stay with us!" Alderheart yowled.

Paw steps sounded outside the den. Ashstar and Littlecloud popped up in the den.

"Alderheart! Is Stoneheart ok-" Ashstar was cut off as he looked at Stoneheart's flailing body.

Stoneheart wheezed. "I can't.... breathe!" He gasped. His eyes started to dull.

Ashstar raced to his son's side. "Stoneheart! Don't die!" He yowled.

His yowl echoed in the camp and more cats rushed outside of the den.

Ashstar watched as his son took one last breath, then he lay still, foam still bubbling in his mouth. His eyes were dull as they stared into nothingness.

Ashstar gasped in horror. He buried his face in his son's pelt. After what seemed like forever, he lifted his face to glare at Alderheart. "It's all your fault!" He hissed, his pelt bristling.

Alderheart felt guilty. *Yes*, he thought, *it really* is *my fault...*

Ashstar pushed Alderheart back in rage and then unsheathed his claws.

"Hey, Ashstar, stop!" Alderheart meowed.

"I'm not stopping until you're dead!" Ashstar yowled. He lunged forward, sinking his teeth into Alderheart's muzzle. He sunk his sharp claws into Alderheart's shoulders, pinning him against the brambles. Thorns dug into Alderheart's back.

"Ashstar!" Littlecloud gasped. "You can't kill a medicine cat!" He yowled.

"It's against the warrior code!" Graystripe yowled.

Still, Ashstar did not stop. He only tightened his jaws around Alderheart's muzzle.

Paw steps pounded outside the den and Jaywing rushed inside, her paws skidding on the wet ground. "Ashstar! Stop!" She yowled.

Ashstar finally let go of Alderheart's muzzle. He pushed him to the ground and pinned him down, holding his paw to his throat. Alderheart's heart beat faster. Ashstar turned to glare at his daughter. "Why should I?" He asked.

"Don't kill Alderheart," Jaywing meowed. "Do you think Stoneheart would of wanted that? He wouldn't approve of what you've done," She meowed, her eyes dull.

Ashstar sheathed his claws and his pelt began to lay still. He then put his head down. "You're right," He sighed. He then turned to glare at Alderheart. "But you better not let any other cats die," He whispered to him in a dark voice like ice.

Alderheart gulped and nodded.

Ashstar backed off of him and turned around to sadly stare at Stoneheart's dead body. He buried his muzzle in Stoneheart's gray pelt. Jaywing sat down beside him, her tail twitching occasionally.

Ivypool rushed in the den, her eyes wide with panic. "Stoneheart!" She gasped.

Alderheart didn't want to be here anymore. He got to his paws and trudged from the den, his paws and tail dragging in the soft dirt. *I'll go to the medicine den and make myself useful*, he thought. Pushing past cats, he made his way into the clearing, seeing Cinderheart rush over from the nursery. She pushed past Alderheart and ran into the elders' den. Firepaw and Fluffypaw rushed over to the elders' den as well, their eyes widened.

Alderheart sighed inwardly. Stoneheart's death was all his fault. If only he had cared about washing off his paws. All that catmint had been wasted trying to save Stoneheart's life. The catmint wouldn't do any help to save Stoneheart, and Alderheart should've known that. He was nearing the medicine den, and was close enough to hear Mothstripe and Twistedpaw talking together.

Alderheart then remembered that when the little brown had woken up, he had been named. He said he was a rogue, but he also said that he couldn't remember what happened. Alderheart padded to the medicine den, and saw Twistedpaw sitting beside Mothstripe with her kits sleeping beside her belly.

Twistedpaw looked up. "Hey Alderheart!" He purred. He got to his paws, greeting Alderheart, purring. He rubbed his muzzle along Alderheart's shoulder, then he stiffened. "Why are you bleeding?" He asked.

Alderheart felt guilty to lie to him. "I got scratched by some thorns," He meowed, his tail drooping.

"Why's your muzzle torn like that? It looks as if some cat bit it," Twistedpaw meowed.

"Thorns," Alderheart lied.

Twistedpaw's tail drooped. "I wish you were my dad, Alderheart," He meowed. "You're so cool! I want to learn everything that you learn!" He meowed, his tail raising again. His eyes shone brightly.

Alderheart sighed. He could take another apprentice, maybe, but he would need StarClan's approval.

"I could take you as an apprentice," Alderheart meowed. "But StarClan needs to approve it," He explained. He felt bad for the apprentice. What if StarClan didn't approve of it? He couldn't be a warrior since he had that twisted paw. Alderheart went to the back of the medicine den to grab some chervil. He chewed it up and then spat it out on his paw. He rubbed the pulp on the deep scratches on his muzzle. It stung, but he didn't mind. The scratches on his shoulders burned, but Alderheart decided not to worry about them. He turned and saw Twistedpaw crouched, his tail lashing.

Twistedpaw leaped through the air, landing on Mothstripe's twitching tail-tip, but then he grunted and fell on his side, shaking his twisted paw. The bent stick slipped from the loose cobwebs on his paw.

Alderheart grabbed some fresh cobwebs and raced over to him.

Twistedpaw sat up, looking sad.

Mothstripe sat up and padded over to him, then sat down beside him. "It's ok," She soothed.

Alderheart held Twistedpaw's twisted paw up in the air so that he could hold the stick to his paw. He wrapped cobwebs around his paw to help the stick stay in its place.

"How long would that have to stay on?" Twistedpaw asked, looking at his paw.

"For about another moon," Alderheart told him. He padded to the back of the den and scooped more cobwebs. He padded back over to Twistedpaw.

"Why does it have to stay on? My paw's broken!" Twistedpaw mewled. He narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. "Does it have to heal?"

He asked.

"Yes," Alderheart nodded. He took the cobwebs off the small brown tom's ears and took a look at them. His ears were healing quickly. "Your ears look good," He commented.

"But the cobwebs stay on, still, right? To avoid infection?" Twistedpaw prompted.

Alderheart was surprised at his knowledge. "Yes," He meowed. "You sure know a bit about medicine cat skills," He purred.

Twistedpaw's eyes brightened.

Alderheart wrapped the fresh cobwebs around his ears. He removed the dirty cobwebs from Twistedpaw's nasty head injury. He remembered last time that he had put chervil juices on the wound to avoid infection. He put his paw on the wound, and was shocked when he felt a bit of heat coming from it.

"It's infected," Alderheart sighed. He looked at Twistedpaw. "Do you know what herb fights infection?" He asked. "Take a guess if you don't know," He added, a glint in his eyes.

"Ummm," Twistedpaw muttered. "Chervil?"

"Correct! How'd you know?" Alderheart asked.

"I'm not sure how I knew, I just guessed! But at least I've learned something," Twistedpaw pointed out cheerfully.

Alderheart purred softly. He'd make a great medicine cat apprentice.

"I'd love to have him as my apprentice," Mothstripe meowed.

Alderheart turned to get some chervil. "But you can't have an apprentice," He pointed out. "You've got kits. They still have three more moons to go," He meowed, flicking his tail. "If you wanted him as an apprentice, you'd have to give up your kits to Cinderheart," He meowed.

"I never would!" Mothstripe growled. "But I guess you're right," She sighed. "Alright, you can train him."

"I understand how you feel," Alderheart meowed. "You'll just have to wait for the next apprentice to be skilled at healing."

"And when will that be?" Mothstripe sighed.

"Someday," Alderheart muttered. He padded over to Twistedpaw. He spat out the chervil juices onto his paw and started to rub them on his head wound. He grabbed more cobwebs from his paw and patted them on Twistedpaw's wound.

"Alright," Alderheart meowed. "That should do. Now go to your nest in the back and get some sleep," He told the little tom.

Mothstripe watched as he limped to his nest in the back and curled up to sleep. Mothstripe looked at Alderheart. "We should be going to sleep as well," She meowed, padding over to her nest.

"I'll stay up," He meowed. "I've got sick cats to look after."

"Be careful," Mothstripe warned. "Don't get yourself sick. What would we do without you?" She asked, half to herself. She then trudged to her nest and curled up for sleep, her back facing Alderheart.

Alderheart was left sitting in the middle of the den, a pool of moonlight drenching him, turning his pelt silver. He watched Mothstripe's golden pelt rise and fall as she breathed slowly. Her kits were curled up against her back. Mothstripe's words still burned inside his mind: What would we do without you?

Chapter 58

Alderheart woke in his nest to the sound of yowling outside. He rose to his paws and looked over in Mothstripe's nest. She wasn't there, except for her kits cuddled up together. Alderheart padded over to where they were, and crouched down. He put his paw to Falconkit's head, then he put his paw to Willowkit's head. They were both healthy, not sick.

Alderheart looked over in Twistedpaw's nest, seeing that he also wasn't there. Alderheart padded into the open, seeing that Ashstar was on High Ledge, and cats were gathered below him. Alderheart raced up the rocks and climbed up on High Ledge, padding to Ashstar, his tail flicking.

Ashstar turned towards him, his ear twitching. His blue eyes narrowed and he shifted his paws, giving Alderheart an uneasy look.

"Are you picking a new deputy?" Alderheart asked. "You haven't picked one in two moons," He pointed out.

"No, I'm not picking a deputy," Ashstar growled. "I'm just gathering patrols together. And Alderheart, you need to take Twistedpaw up to the MoonCave," He added.

"Alright, I'll head there now," Alderheart meowed.

"You're going to take a warrior with you," Ashstar growled. He scanned his Clan, his tail lashing. He then turned back to Alderheart. "Take Squirrelflight," He meowed.

"Alright," Alderheart sighed. He didn't need a warrior with him; no other cat would attack him.

Alderheart waited at the camp entrance, Twistedpaw by his side. They were waiting on Squirrelflight to come over to them. *She must've gone to drink something after eating those traveling herbs*, Alderheart thought.

Jaywing, who was at guard near the camp entrance, glanced at them. "Be safe," She meowed.

"Don't worry, we will. It's not like WindClan will come over and attack us," Alderheart meowed. He hoped they wouldn't attack...

"Well they do have a new warrior," Jaywing meowed. "Fernpaw became Fernwhisker," She meowed. "I can't believe that WindClan is growing fast," She added, her blue eyes shining. She flicked her tail and curled it around her paws.

Then, the bushes at the top of the hill outside camp rustled, and Squirrelflight popped out, racing down the slope to meet them. "Alderheart, Twistedpaw, sorry I took so long!" She meowed. "I couldn't get that disgusting taste off my tongue," She added, wrinkling her nose and closing her eyes.

Alderheart purred with amusement. His gaze swept across Twistedpaw and Squirrelflight. "Lets go," He meowed.

Ashstar curled up for sleep in his den, feeling empty inside. He had visited his kits and his mate to make himself feel happy, but he just couldn't purr. He had set his daughter Jaywing up to guard the camp entrance. Ashstar knew she was strong, and she'd protect the camp from intruders. Paw steps sounded outside he den, along with a slight purr.

Ashstar lifted his head and saw Jaywing, a fat mouse in her jaws. "Ashstar, eat," She meowed, dropping the mouse by his nest. "You haven't eaten all day, and I know you're hungry," She meowed.

Ashstar could hear his belly growling. He snatched the mouse and started eating it. After he was done, his hunger faded away and he

licked his lips.

Jaywing sat down beside him, her eyes dull. "You haven't purred at all ever since Stoneheart died," She pointed out, her tail flicking.

"I know, and it's because I'm not happy. How can I live without him? He was my son as well as my deputy," Ashstar meowed, his voice cracking. He put his head back n his paws. "Don't try to make me happy. I need sleep," He choked, closing his eyes.

Jaywing's presence was still beside him for a few more heartbeats, then she finally left the den, her paw steps echoing away.

Ashstar finally sunk into the depths of sleep. Darkness swamped his vision, then after what seemed like a few heartbeats, blackness faded into blurred colors, then it got clear. Ashstar found himself on a hill. Stars glittered around him, dancing on the grass ad twinkling in the sky. Ashstar padded forward, expecting to see Stoneheart, or maybe his mother, Brindleface, but instead, he only saw the hill slope down towards three cats: A black she-cat, a large golden tom, and a gray tabby tom.

Ashstar padded down slope towards them and as he closer, he recognized them right away. Hollyleaf, Jayfeather, and Lionblaze! He growled in annoyance. He didn't want to see them, he just wanted to see Stoneheart!

Hollyleaf noticed him and bristled. "Well look who it is," She growled.

Jayfather turned his blind blue gaze on Ashstar. "Look at what StarClan brought us," He grumbled.

"Ashstar?" Lionblaze yawned.

Ashstar glared at them. "Why did I even come here in the first place?" He growled.

"I'm not sure, but maybe StarClan wants you to make friends with us," Lionblaze meowed, flicking his tail.

Hollyleaf glared at Ashstar. "Make friends with the cat that killed

us? No way," She spat.

"Why would we ever be friends with you?" Jayfeather grumbled. "It's like a cat trying to be friends with a badger!" He exaggerated.

Ashstar growled in annoyance, then crouched down. "Bring me back, please, StarClan," He muttered.

"Ashstar," A voice behind him meowed. "You must make friends with them." The voice had a leader-like tone to it.

Ashstar turned to see Firestar. His green eyes shone, and his fur glittered with starlight. Stars twinkled around his paws.

"Why?" Ashstar asked.

"Because you must learn that things change," Firestar meowed, his tail flicking. "At least tell them that you're sorry for killing them," He added, a glint in his eyes.

Ashstar turned to look at them; it was hard not to glare at them. "I-I'm sorry," He muttered.

"Louder," Firestar whispered behind him.

Ashstar lashed his tail. "Listen, I'm sorry for killing you!" He growled to the three cats.

Hollyleaf snorted and looked away. Lionblaze blinked at him, and Jayfeather's blind stare caught him.

"They haven't accepted my apology," Ashstar growled.

Firestar looked at him. "It takes time," He pointed out.

All of a sudden, darkness swamped Ashstar's vision, and he fell through darkness, his yowls echoing. He woke in his nest, panting. It still felt like he was falling. Wind tugged his fur.

Ashstar growled and rose to his paws, feeling hungry again. He climbed down the rocks and saw Alderheart by the medicine den, Twistedpaw at his side.

"Did it go well?" Ashstar asked.

"Yes," Alderheart meowed, his voice shaking. He looked scared. Fear scent drifted from his pelt, and his eyes were glazed with fear.

"What's wrong?" Ashstar asked.

"Back on our way to camp, we were attacked by a rogue," Alderheart explained. "He didn't attack but he said his name was Silk. He said he'd come for us," He meowed, his voice shaking. "And at the MoonCave, I had a vision. A terrible vision. The camp was soaked in blood, and I saw strange cats everywhere. StarClan also told me that an alder will grow to save his Clan, and I'm not even sure what that meant," He meowed.

"Get some rest," Ashstar told him. "Tomorrow is half-moon, right? You'll need rest," He meowed. As he walked away from Alderheart, towards the fresh-kill pile, he felt fear tickling at the bottom of his belly. A rogue named Silk said he'd come for us..... But when?

Chapter 59

Ashstar woke to the sound of a single yowl. He scrabbled to his paws, his tail lashing. He raced from the den and climbed down the rocks. At the camp entrance, Ivypool stood in a defensive pose. In front of her were three cats. A large white tom, bigger that Ivypool, a large tom with a white head and chest and a very dark gray body along with a white tail, and a ginger she-cat with scars across her eyes.

"Hey!" Ashstar growled. "Who are you?" He hissed.

The large white tom pushed past Ivypool, his friends following him.

Ivypool backed up, and Squirrelflight came to stand beside her, glaring at the strangers.

"I'm Silk, and this is Kindle," The large white tom meowed, pointing with his tail to the ginger she-cat. "And this is Vally," He meowed, flicking his tail towards the large white with a white head and chest and dark gray body.

"What are you doing here, Silk?" Ashstar asked, glaring at them. He felt suspicious and his claws slid out.

Silk smirked. "Don't worry about us, we aren't a threat," He meowed, his tail flicking. He twitched his ears, looking at Ashstar's claws.

Alderheart padded up beside Ashstar and gasped. "Th- that's him!" He whispered. "The tom that said he'd come for us!" He meowed, his eyes wide with panic.

Ashstar gave Silk a glare. "What do you want?" He asked, his voice dark.

"Be prepared," Silk meowed. "Some cat might turn on you," He told

him, a glint in his eyes. "Shadows with claws of darkness," He sighed.

"What do you mean? ShadowClan? ShadowClan would never turn on us!" Ashstar growled.

"Whatever, at least I warned you. I wasn't talking about your stupid weak Clans," Silk growled.

Tigerheart, who was close by, bristled and his eyes blazed with rage. "How dare you call my Clan weak!" He hissed. He leaped on Silk, his claws striking Silk's face. Silk yowled in alarm.

Kindle sunk her claws in Tigerheart's back and tried to drag him off, but he had a good grip on Silk. Silk sunk his teeth into Tigerheart's neck and threw him to the side.

Tigerheart got to his paws, panting.

Kindle then leaped towards him, lashing out at his face.

"Hey! Stop!" Ashstar yowled. He leaped on Kindle, pinning her to the ground, his claws unsheathed.

Vally still sat back, watching, his eyes wide with panic.

Silk had scratches on his cheeks. He glared at Tigerheart.

Squirrelflight and Ivypool leaped on Silk and pinned him to the ground. Jaywing joined in to help.

"Tigerheart! Are you ok?" Dawnpelt cried, rushing over to her brother.

"I'm...fine," Tigerheart panted. Blood dripped from a small scratch on his throat.

Ashstar got to his paws, yet held a paw to Kindle's throat. He looked at Silk struggling to fight off the three she-cats. "Stop!" He hissed, glaring at Silk. "Take your stupid rogues and leave!"

Squirrelflight and Ivypool and Jaywing got to their paws.

"Leave," Ashstar growled to Silk, showing his fangs.

"Alright then, but we'll be back," Silk growled. "I have more cats than you can imagine," Silk growled, giving Ashstar a glare. "Kindle, Vally, come with me," Silk flicked his tail, and the large white tom left.

"We should follow him and make sure he doesn't try anything," Ivypool pointed out, flicking her tail.

Ashstar nodded and flicked his tail to let them follow the rogues.

Alderheart's eyes were thin slits. "I knew it," He whispered. "They're coming for us."

Ashstar glanced at him. "I...think you should rest," He pointed out.

"No! No! I'm fine," Alderheart grinned. "After all, I'm looking after every cat. Twistedpaw has barely started his training, and Mothstripe is still looking after her kits," He meowed.

"Isn't Littlecloud here?" Ashstar asked.

Alderheart nodded then walked off, his tail flicking behind him.

Ashstar walked over to Tigerheart, seeing that he had blood dripping from a scratch on his throat. Dawnpelt let him lean against her.

"Are you ok? Do you need to see Alderheart?" Ashstar asked.

"No, I'm fine. I'll be fine," Tigerheart panted.

"No you aren't. Go and see Alderheart," Ashstar growled to him, flicking his tail.

Tigerheart walked away, Dawnpelt at his side.

Ashstar decided to head to the fresh-kill pile. He picked two mice, one for himself and one for Cinderheart. He padded to the nursery and caught a glimpse of Twistedpaw stumbling outside the medicine cat den. His twisted paw was held against his side. His

ears were cut up and a nasty scar was across his forehead. Besides all those wounds, his eyes shone and he looked confident.

Palekit squeaked with excitment as she saw Ashstar. She raced up to her father, jumping and purring. Ashstar was about to lick her head, but then loud yowls exploded from behind him, in the camp entrance.

"Ashstar! They're attacking!"

Chapter 60

Ashstar was thrown into the shrieks of battle. Hisses broke out around him, and he saw Squirrelflight limping toward a ginger she-cat, then he saw Silk. The rogues had come.... Alderheart was right...

Ashstar saw Silk pinning Jaywing down to the ground. Jaywing's face had a look of horror and Silk raised a paw, claws outstretched.

Ashstar raced towards them, leaping through the air. His claws sunk into Silk's back and he drug him off his daughter. He bared his fangs at the large tom, and as they stood a tail length away from each other, Ashstar realized that Silk was a bit larger than him. As he stared into the tom's amber eyes, claws sunk into his back and that's when Silk sprang at him, his claws extended.

Jaywing scrambled to her paws and launched herself at Silk. She dug her claws into his forehead and blood trickled from the small scratches.

Ashstar sprang up and saw that Kindle was behind him.

"Don't you dare lay a claw on Silk!" She hissed. She charged at Jaywing, her claws extended.

Ashstar lashed out and raked his claws down her side. Blood sprang into the air, spattering the ground.

Kindle turned to glare at him, then realized she was outnumbered as Ivypool sprang over to help Ashstar. Kindle sprang away when she realized that Silk had run to fight another cat.

Jaywing stumbled to Ashstar's side. "I don't know how long I can go on," She rasped.

"See Alderheart," Ashstar meowed. He remembered that Stoneheart

had died, and he didn't want to lose Jaywing as well. He stayed by her side as she padded to the medicine den, making sure that no cat would lay a claw on her.

A ginger she-cat sprang towards them, her amber eyes shining.

Ashstar unsheathed his claws and bared his teeth at her. He glared at her.

The ginger she-cat sprang at him, and Ashstar fell back, rolling on his paws. He felt her teeth sink into his scruff.

"The name's Flame!" She meowed, yet it was muffled.

Ashstar growled and twisted around, slashing at her eyes. Blood sprayed his face and she dropped him on the ground. As she turned to run, Jaywing leaped towards her and raked her claws down her side. The she-cat ran off, leaving behind a trail of dark blood.

Jaywing limped to the medicine den, the brambles swishing behind her.

Kindle leaped after her, her tail streaming behind her.

Ashstar yowled and flung himself at her. They tumbled and rolled on the grass, a ball of fur and claws. Kindle's claws raked down the side of his face, and she sunk her fangs in his shoulder. Blood stained Ashstar's gray fur and he sunk his fangs into Kindle's throat and pushed with hind paws against her belly. She sunk her claws into his leg and raked them down, then tore away from him.

Ashstar spat fur and blood from his mouth and stumbled away from the medicine den. He saw Squirrelflight slashing at Flame. He ran towards her and jumped on Flame, sinking his claws in her shoulders. She realized she was outnumbered and then fled.

"Squirrelflight, I need you to guard the medicine den," Ashstar meowed.

Firepaw and Fluffypaw were across the clearing fighting Vally, lashing out at him. They were trying their hardest. Ashstar was about to help, but he heard a yowl.

"Look out!" Some cat screeched.

Ashstar turned to see Silk and his eyes widened. Silk raised his paws and slashed. Ashstar was ready to lose a life, ready for the pain that would come. Then, dark ginger fur rushed towards him. Alderheart!

Alderheart unsheathed his claws and hissed at Silk, but it was too late for Alderheart to defend himself, and Silk's claws slashed his throat.

Ashstar gasped in horror as blood sprayed Silk's white coat and face. His amber eyes shone and he sprang away to Squirrelflight.

Alderheart slumped over and blood pooled around him.

"No! No!" Twistedpaw cried. "No! Alderheart!" He yowled.

Ashstar crouched down, horror bubbling in his throat. He felt sick. Why would Alderheart risk his life to save him? *After all I've done to him, and he saves me*?

Twistedpaw threw his face in his mentor's fur, whining and whimpering like a lost kit.

The battling around Ashstar stopped and cats stared in horror at the medicine cat. Squirrelflight dealt another blow to Flame's face and sprang toward Alderheart, her eyes widened in horror. "No! Alderheart!" She cried. She buried her face in her son's shoulder.

Alderheart's eyes flicked open. He wheezed when he breathed. "It's ok," He rasped. "It was my time to join StarClan."

"No!" Twistedpaw cried. He turned around and raced to the medicine den. He returned with a huge wad of cobwebs. He pressed them on the gash in Alderheart's throat. But the cobwebs didn't work and they were quickly soaked with blood. Blood still gushed from Alderheart's throat. Blood trickled down his mouth and chin.

"There's nothing you can do to save me," Alderheart rasped. "I'm going to die no matter what you do."

Twistedpaw's eyes widened. "No!" He cried. "No you aren't!"

Mothstripe ran from the medicine den, Jaywing limping after her.

Ashstar realized that all of his Clan were gathering around him. Mossheart stared sadly at the medicine cat's body. Sootwing sat beside her sister and mother.

Ashstar got to his paws and saw Silk. Vally, Kindle, Flame, and other strange rogues were behind him. He glared at them.

"Silk, it is time for your cats to leave," He growled.

"So you admit defeat?" Silk hissed. "Then we shall be taking your territory!" He spat. He unsheathed his bloody claws and crouched, ready to spring at Ashstar.

Alderheart's eyes dulled and he closed his eyes.

The cats wailed in terror and distress.

"No, we don't admit defeat!" Ashstar growled. "Just leave our territory! Enough blood has been shed," He meowed, looking at Alderheart in a pool of his blood. "You've killed Alderheart, and I won't let you kill any other cat!"

Squirrelflight shot up, unsheathing her claws. She turned to glare at Silk. "How dare you kill my son!" She yowled. She leaped over her Clanmates and leaped on top of Silk, raking her claws across his throat. Silk yowled in terror. Squirrelflight sunk her teeth into the back of his neck and wouldn't let go; she crunched harder.

Silk then slumped over, blood pooling around him. He thrashed for a few heartbeats, then fell limp. The other rogues stared in terror, then they turned and ran.

"Get out of here, mange-pelts! Don't ever show your cursed-selves here again!" Squirrelflight yowled.

"There was no need to kill him," Ashstar pointed out.

"There was a reason! He killed my son, a medicine cat!" She hissed with rage. She calmed down a bit and ran over to her dead son.

Twistedpaw lifted his face from Alderheart's fur. He whimpered and turned to Mothstripe. "Is this a dream?"

That question made Ashstar's heart break in half. He waited for Mothstripe's reply.

She sadly shook her head. "I'm so sorry Twistedpaw, but it's not a dream," She sighed.

Twistedpaw then whimpered and got to his paws, running out of the camp entrance.

"No! Twistedpaw! Don't go! Rogues could be out there!" Mothstripe yowled. She got to her paws, about to follow.

"No, don't go out there! You're a medicine cat, you'd need a warrior with you," Ashstar meowed.

Mothstripe's eyes dulled. "Just.... let him go," She sighed.

They all sat in a ragged circle around Alderheart's dead body.

Ashstar wondered deeply in his thoughts. What would they do without Alderheart? Mothstripe's kits still needed one more moon to go, and Twistedpaw wasn't a full medicine cat. He closed his eyes. Oh StarClan, he thought, what will we do?

Chapter 61 Allegiances

ThunderClan:

Leader: Ashstar- Gray tom with a half right ear and a scar on his shoulder

Deputy: Squirrelflight- Dark flame-colored she-cat with one white paw

Medicine cats: Mothstripe- Pretty golden she-cat with a long, fluffy tail- Apprentice, Twistedpaw

Littlecloud- Small, thin, brown tabby tom with light blue eyes

Warriors:

Graystripe- Dark gray tom with yellow eyes

Jaywing- Gray she-cat with blue eyes

Mossheart- Light silver she-cat with green eyes and black patches on her pelt- Apprentice, Thistlepaw

Ivypool- Silver and white tabby she-cat- Apprentice, Slatepaw

Bramblehawk- Brown tom with amber eyes and black stripes- Apprentice, Amberpaw

Sootwing- Gray she-cat- Apprentice, Snowpaw

Firestorm- Flame-colored tom with a thick pelt

Fluffypelt- Fluffy white and brown she-cat with green eyes and a torn ear

Tigerheart- Sleek brown tabby tom with tiger stripes and thick fur and amber eyes

Dawnpelt- Cream she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentices:

Thistlepaw- Gray and white she-cat with strange purple eyes

Amberpaw- Ginger colored she-cat with amber eyes and a white belly

Slatepaw- Light gray she-cat with black paws

Snowpaw- White tom

Twistedpaw- Small brown tom with cut ears and a twisted paw

Willowpaw- Gray she-cat with white paws and a white underbelly

Falconpaw- Brown tom with a golden muzzle and green eyes

Queens:

Cinderheart- Dappled smoky-gray she-cat(Mother to Ashstar's kits: Palekit, Moonkit, and Smallkit)

Cats staying with ThunderClan:

Rust

Flower

Sappaw

Pinepaw

Ebonyfur

WindClan:

Leader: Harestar

Deputy: Gorsetail

Medicine Cats: Kestrelflight

Rabbittail

Warriors:

Tawnypelt

Doveclaw

Eaglefeather

Fernwhisker

Chapter 61

"Take out the border patrol," Ashstar meowed to Squirrelflight. He turned away from her and padded to the rocks that led up to his den along with High Ledge. He climbed up the rocks and padded up on High Ledge. He scanned his Clan, seeing that Rust and Flower were by the fresh-kill pile, their tails entwined together. Ashstar growled inwardly. Were they secretly going to become mates? "All cats old enough to hunt join beneath the High Ledge for a Clan meeting!" His voice rung around the camp.

His whole Clan had gathered and they were staring expectantly at Ashstar, their eyes dull.

"Rust, Flower, Ebonyfur, Sappaw, Pinepaw, Tigerheart, Dawnpelt, and Littlecloud, come to my den," He meowed. He watched as all the cats gathered and climbed up the rocks to come to his den. Ashstar turned and walked into his den, sitting down on the moss.

"What is it?" Rust asked.

"About building RiverClan and ShadowClan," Ashstar told the tom. For a quick second, he almost thought he saw relief in the tom's eyes.

"So should I take them to the MoonCave?" Littecloud asked.

"Yes, Rust and Flower should go," Ashstar meowed. "And I'll also go," He told them.

"What about us?" Tigerheart asked.

"Wait until we get back," Ashstar answered. He turned his tail on them and took the lead of the group as Littlecloud, Rust, and Flower followed him. They reached the camp entrance and waited for a moment. "Are you ready?" He asked the patrol.

The cats nodded, yet there was a look of fear in Rust's eyes. Flower leaned against him, and the fear faded. The group headed out.

Ashstar was crossing through the paths and cutting through the thick undergrowth. He could hear the river rushing past on the far side of the territory. His whiskers twitched with suspicion as he caught the scent of rogue. It seemed fresh. He halted and swished his tail for the patrol to stop. He closed his eyes and focused on the smells around him. Ashstar couldn't smell it anymore. Maybe he had just imagined it...

Closer to the Mountain Trail, the wind blew strongly, carrying with it the scents of Twoleg Place and rogues. Rocks fell from the steep trail and Ashstar realized that they should've come here at night when he looked up to see the sun. His ear twitched as he heard rustling behind him. He thought it was some cat in his patrol, but every cat that had come here was right behind him. His muscles tensed and he turned to pad a bit toward the moving bush.

"What's wrong?" Rust asked.

"I think someone's following us," Ashstar growled, his tail bushing up.

Rust flattened his ears. "Well once we get up the mountain, they'll have nothing to hide in, that is, if some cat is following us," He pointed out.

"I guess you're right," Ashstar sighed after a moment of silence. He turned. "Let's go," He mewed.

As they started climbing the trail, a hiss came from behind them.

"Darn right some cat followed you!" A voice hissed.

Ginger fur caught Ashstar's eye as he turned, then was quickly able to make out the figure of Kindle. "Kindle?!" He hissed.

"Yes, it's me!" Kindle growled. She flicked her tail and more figures stepped from the bushes. Ashstar was able to recognize Flame and Vally. They leaped to Kindle's side. Two more figures stepped from the bushes: A brown tom with amber eyes and a gray she-cat.

"Scar, Brindle," Kindle meowed. "Be prepared."

The brown tom nodded. "You can count on us," He meowed.

"I knew I could, Scar," Kindle meowed.

Ashstar turned to his group. "Littlecloud, go and get help!" He meowed to the medicine cat.

"I don't think so!" A hiss behind him made him turn around, and a black and white tom grabbed Littlecloud and pinned him down.

"How did you even know we'd be here?" Ashstar hissed.

"Well, little did you know, I got Vally to spy for me!" Kindle hissed. "And we will get rid of you for once and for all! There won't be any Clans left once we take our revenge! You killed our leader Silk, and you must pay!" She hissed. Without warning, she leaped at Ashstar, her claws extended.

Ashstar's heart sank with terror as he realized they were outnumbered, but it was lucky enough that they had two trained warriors with them. Claws sank into Ashstar's shoulders, and Kindle pinned him down, her teeth bared. She thrust him away from her all of a sudden, and Ashstar's paws slipped on the ground. He almost went over the edge, but he caught himself.

Kindle raced over to him. "Just give up!" She hissed and sank her claws into Ashstar's paws. They were pretty high up on the trail, and if Ashstar fell from this height, he'd lose a life. He bared his teeth at Kindle. "Never!"

Kindle's grip tightened. "Then you can die!" She hissed.

A calico figure flashed through the air. It was Flower! She shoved Kindle to the ground and slashed at her ears and muzzle. With a scratch on her muzzle and a nick in her ear, Kindle backed off to go and help Brindle with Rust. Flower turned to Ashstar. She grabbed his scruff and helped him get up.

"Thanks!" Ashstar gasped.

"We can win against these mange-pelts!" Flower hissed. She sprang over to help Rust. Ashstar followed.

Ashstar leaped on Vally. He pinned the large tom to the ground and sank his teeth in his shoulder.

Vally fought back, kicking Ashstar in the belly with his hind legs. Blood sprayed Vally's belly fur.

Ashstar was shoved backward, but he quickly got back on his paws. With terror, he realized that the rogues were winning. Kindle had Flower pinned to the ground, a paw on her throat. Scar and Brindle had Rust pinned to the ground.

Vally ran to Littlecloud and pinned him down. The black and white tom slipped from his spot and helped Kindle pin down Flower, then Kindle took the chance to race over to Ashstar. She knocked him back, digging her claws in his shoulder.

Ashstar sprang up and raced in a circle around Kindle, remembering what Russetstar did. He darted in quickly, raking her legs with his claws. Kindle stayed still, yet crouched, and her eyes flitted towards him. Then, she leaped in front of Ashstar's face and lashed at his throat and muzzle. Ashstar sprang back quickly, but her claws caught the fur on his throat and muzzle.

A hiss behind Kindle made Ashstar shiver, and Kindle leaped on Ashstar's back, pinning him down. "Give up!" She hissed.

Ashstar struggled under her grip. "No! Never!" He growled.

"Fine, then if you don't give up your territory," She placed a paw on

his throat and flicked her tail. Vally padded over to them, dragging Littlecloud by the scruff. "Littlecloud and you shall die!" She growled, her green eyes shining.

Ashstar's heart stopped. He could remember this happening, a long time ago. Stoneheart was held back by Wolfpaw, and Crow forced Ashstar to give up his territory or else he would kill Stoneheart. Now what could he do? Give up his territory again? He was about to speak when a hiss broke out.

"Hey! What are you doing?" A yowl came from below.

A tawny cat raced up the trail, her claws unsheathed. It was Tawnypelt! Doveclaw and Kestrelflight accompanied her side. "What are you doing?" Tawnypelt demanded.

Kindle glared at her. "If you want to stop us, then that means that Littlecloud will be sacrificed!" She hissed.

While she was distracted by the WindClan cats, Ashstar lifted his paw and slashed Kindle's throat. Blood leaped out on Ashstar, and he flinched. He saw all the rogues' eyes widen, and Vally let Littlecloud go. Kindle was still on her paws and blood trickled from her mouth. Blood dripped from the gash in her throat. "Don't think you have won!" Kindle hissed. "I have more cats than you can imagine!"

Ashstar lashed his tail. He sank his claws in her head and pushed her to the ground. "You've lost this battle!" He hissed.

Kindle thrashed and kicked out with her paws, then her shriek was cut off as she fell limp.

"Kindle!" Vally shrieked out. "We shall avenge your death!" He hissed. He bared his fangs at Ashstar. "Coward, you won this battle because your friends showed up!" He spat.

"And do you admit defeat?" Ashstar growled. "Are you sure you still want to battle? You're outnumbered now, and I'd easily kill you," Ashstar growled.

Scar and Brindle got up, their paws scraping the rock, then they fled

down the trail, pushing past Tawnypelt and Doveclaw.

Flame, Vally, and the black and white tom were left. "Smudge, go with the others and go back to base," Vally meowed. The black and white tom nodded, then padded down the trail.

Flower and Rust got to their paws, looking at Vally and Flame.

"We shall be back," Vally hissed. He turned to Flame. "I shall be the new leader of these rogues, and you will be my deputy," He told her, licking her on the top of the head. "Lets go," He meowed. As he padded down the trail, and padded past Ashstar, he gave him a glare, but Ashstar glared back, his stare filled with hatred. As Vally and Flame were out of sight, Ashstar turned to Tawnypelt.

"Thank Starclan you got here!" Ashstar meowed.

"We were about to go to the MoonCave with Kestrelflight. He heard that the rogues sometimes liked to hang around here, so we came with Kestrelflight to make sure he was safe. We saw you and went to help," Tawnypelt explained.

"We were heading to the MoonCave too," Ashstar meowed.

"Trying to see if Rust and Flower could be leaders?" Tawnypelt asked.

"Yes, but looks like we need to get back to camp and get our wounds treated," Ashstar sighed. He flicked his tail and Rust and Flower padded over to stand by his side. Littlecloud came over as well.

"These rogues are just as vicious as the last ones," Tawnypelt pointed out. "Lets hope we don't have to move again," She meowed, then headed up the trail.

The sun was already down by the time the patrol had made it back to camp. Rust was limping and Flower let him lean on her shoulder.

Ashstar wondered why these rogues were being so vicious. He was glad they hadn't tried attacking the camp. But what if they had to

move away from this place? Ashstar realized that they would have to get rid of these rogues, for once and for all.

Author's Note...

Oh my god I'm so glad I got chapter 61 posted!!! I've been so busy and I was trying to make the chapter extra long. Sorry you guys had to wait. I've been going through a lot. My friend got really stressed and I was trying to help her calm down, and I've been feeling kind of depressed lately for some reason. The last day of school was today, and this week I've been getting a lot of bad weather; loud thunder, lots of rain and wind. And I think I almost got raped by my crush O.O But since school is out, I might post chapters more frequently. I probably won't be as stressed, and last weekend my dad found three kittens! They're so cute and friendly!

[image]

From the left to the right: Socks, Smokey, and Pepper

[image]

My crush in the middle XD That's a picture of him in the year book! His name is Dalton ;P

[image]

The bad weather at our house. There were storms after storms. Heavy rain and loud thunder.

I guess that's all. I'm bored and have nothing to do really except wright this story and play with the kittens.... Peace ;0

Chapter 62

Ashstar watched as Squirrelflight arranged the patrols. He had told her to make extra cats go on patrol and to watch out for rogues.

"Ashstar," A voice called. Cinderheart stepped into the den, her eyes shining. "Don't you think it's time that our kits got apprenticed?" She asked, a glint in her eyes.

Ashstar realized he hadn't been paying any attention to his kits. "Well, you're right," He meowed.

There was a yowl across the camp all of a sudden, and Ashstar got to his paws and raced from the den. Rogue scent hit his throat. Mossheart, Thistlepaw, Ivypool, and Slatepaw were at the camp entrance, two rogues in between them. He saw a sleek black and white tom with yellow eyes and a gray tabby she-cat.

Ashstar ran down the rocks and raced over to where they were. His ear twitched. Now up close, he could see that it was Crowfrost and Cloverfoot.

"Ashstar," Crowfrost dipped his head. "We've come to see you. How have you been?" He asked.

"How did you know where to find us?" Ashstar asked, ignoring his question.

"Well, a kittypet-"

"Well, seems like you have the same story that Tigerheart told me," Ashstar growled.

"So, how is ThunderClan? WindClan?" Cloverfoot asked, stepping in.

"Fine. We're beginning to build a new ShadowClan and a new

RiverClan," Ashstar explained.

"We moved here just in time," Crowfrost sighed.

"What even made you come here?" Ashstar asked.

"We left because twolegs were destroying the forest there, and they're going to build more nests," Cloverfoot explained.

Ashstar's heart sank. What if the other rogues moved here? He remembered Russetstar and Crowstar, then he remembered that Tigerheart had told him about Darktail. And what if he became Darkstar?

"There's more of us," Crowfrost meowed. "Whitetail and Antpelt from WindClan, and Reedwhisker, Duskpelt, Mothwing and Willowshine from RiverClan," He meowed. "And we also found a ThunderClan cat: Ferncloud," He added.

At the mention of his sister, Ashstar gasped. "Where are they?" He asked.

"We told them to wait by the mountain trail," Crowfrost meowed. "Should we get them?" He asked.

"Yes!" Ashstar gasped. "We need them!" He meowed. "Oh, Harestar will be happy to hear that two of his warriors survived!" He purred. He ran to the rocks and climbed up, standing on High Ledge. "ThunderClan, listen up!" He called.

Every cat turned towards him, their eyes wide with interest at what Ashstar would do.

"Ivypool, Bramblehawk, I'd like you to go to WindClan and tell them that two ShadowClan warriors have found two WindClan cats. And tell them to come to the mountain trail," Ashstar meowed.

The two warriors nodded and raced out of camp.

"Jaywing, Firestorm, and Tigerheart," Ashstar called. "You're coming with me to the mountain trail." He bounded towards the rocks and climbed down. He walked over to where Crowfrost and

Cloverfoot were. He watched as Jaywing, Firestorm, and Tigerheart raced over to them.

Tigerheart touched noses with Crowfrost and Cloverfoot, purring.

"I'm glad you're alive," Crowfrost meowed to Tigerheart. Cloverfoot purred happily.

Tigerheart blinked at his Clanmate's warm response. "Dawnpelt and Tawnypelt and Littlecloud are alive as well," He meowed.

"That's good," Cloverfoot meowed, flicking her tail.

"We should leave now," Ashstar meowed.

"So, we went through the mountains and met the Tribe of Rushing Water. We asked them if they'd seen you walk through the mountains, and they said yes. Unfortunately, Redwillow, Leaftail, and Beetlewhisker died in the mountains," Crowfrost meowed.

"I didn't even know that RiverClan survived. I thought they all died," Ashstar admitted. "Back in the lake territory, we didn't find any trace of them," He explained.

"Well, we found some near the twoleg place," Crowfrost meowed. "We found Mintfur and Icewing there, and they said they'd come once the Clans were together again," He meowed.

"And why were you even living with Russetstar and Crowstar? Didn't you realize how evil they were?" Ashstar asked, his tail flicking.

Now, they stepped from the undergrowth and set paw on the moor. Dark gray clouds moved slowly in the blue sky. The cats started to pad across the moor, heading towards the mountain trail. Ashstar could see the mountain in the distance, and saw it stretch tall until it reached the clouds and disappeared. He could see a white glow at the top, probably where snow was falling.

"I'm not sure, I just couldn't see past their evil ways," Crowfrost finally answered after a moment of silence. "When Darktail came, I had no idea that he'd be so viscous. I was afraid of leaving with

Cloverfoot because I thought we'd get killed. Then, the Clan found out that Littlecloud, Tigerheart, and Dawnpelt had left, and Crowstar stated that if any cat ever found them on their territory, they'd be killed instantly," Crowfrost meowed.

"And how did you sneak out?" Ashstar asked.

"Well, the twolegs were starting to remove the trees there, and prey was starting to become scarce. Crowstar told us to not leave unless he decided to leave. But I was able to sneak out at night with Cloverfoot. I'm not sure if the rogues will move here," Crowfrost added.

Figures were starting to show farther ahead near the bottom of the mountain trail, and some part of ShadowClan territory was visible on the side, with tall trees and thick bushes.

"There they are," Cloverfoot purred.

All the cats began to walk faster, and the other cats must of saw them because Ashstar could hear cheerful meows.

Finally, they reached the other cats. Whitetail purred happily, and Antpelt's eyes widened.

"You found them!" Antpelt purred.

Mothwing and Willowshine and Duskpelt stared at them in awe. And Ashstar realized that Duskpelt was expecting kits when he saw her rounded belly. He didn't see Ferncloud or Reedwhisker, and was confused. Fear surged through him like rain filling a dip in the earth.

"Where's Reedwhisker and Ferncloud?" Crowfrost asked, worry edging his voice.

"They went to hunt," Antpelt meowed.

Ashstar's heart sank. "Two cats out to hunt?" He asked. "The rogues could kill them!" He gasped in horror.

"Calm down, Ashstar, the rogues aren't here," Whitetail meowed.

"There are rogues living here," Ashstar growled. "A large group of them invaded half of ShadowClan's territory and are resting there!" He explained.

"Are they a problem?" Crowfrost asked, turning to him. "You never told me that rogues lived here!" He gasped.

"Maybe I didn't tell you," Ashstar sighed. "And, duh, they're a big problem! They've killed Alderheart!" He hissed.

"They killed a medicine cat?" Mothwing asked. "That's terrible!"

"Squirrelflight killed Silk in return though, and I've killed Kindle. But every time one of their cats die, it's like another cat joins them!" Ashstar growled. He turned to his cats. "Jaywing, Firestorm, I'd like you to follow me-"

He was cut off as he heard cheerful meows coming from the other side of him. He saw Harestar, Ivypool, Bramblehawk, Tawnypelt, and Gorsetail racing towards them.

"Harespring! Gorsetail!" Whitetail and Antpelt cried. They raced over to greet them.

Harestar purred with joy. "I'm Hare*star* now," He meowed. "And Gorsetail is my deputy," He meowed.

Tawnypelt moved forward to touch noses with Crowfrost and Cloverfoot. She purred with delight. "ShadowClan shall recover," She murmured.

Ashstar was getting worried. Why hadn't Ferncloud and Reedwhisker returned yet?

Harestar and Gorsetail touched noses with Whitetail and Antpelt.

When all the cats had exchanged friendly greetings, Ivypool and Bramblehawk padded over to Ashstar. "Hey, I thought Crowfrost and Cloverfoot said that Reedwhisker and Ferncloud were here," Ivypool meowed, confused.

"Where are they? I don't see them," Bramblehawk added.

"Whitetail and Antpelt told me that Ferncloud and Reedwhisker had gone hunting," Ashstar meowed. "Ivypool, Bramblehawk," He began. He turned to the rest of his cats. "Firestorm and Jaywing, come with me," He meowed.

All of them nodded and gathered around him, but before any of them could move, a yowl rang out across the moor.

A black figure raced towards them and leaped in the air, heading towards Harestar.

Chapter 63

The sun shone down on the black figure, and a large white head was visible, along with a dark gray body. Claws flashed through the air, and Ashstar could make out Vally.

The large white cat landed on Harestar, his teeth sinking into the tom's neck and his claws slashing at him.

"No! Harestar!" Gorsetail cried. He leaped on Vally and slashed at him.

Ashstar leaped on Vally and sunk his teeth into his scruff. He heaved the large cat in the air and threw him off Harestar.

Harestar lay still on the ground, blood streaming from his neck.

Mothwing gasped in horror. She turned to Whitetail and Antpelt. "Find cobwebs!" She gasped.

Dark red blood stained Vally's mouth. He licked his lips.

More rogues came from the bushes. Flame, Brindle, and Scar. They realized they were outnumbered.

"Leave!" Ashstar hissed to the rogues.

"Never! Not until I avenge Kindle's death!" Vally hissed.

"You're outnumbered, and would never win this fight!" Ashstar pointed out, his tail flicking.

Vally's eyes clouded with fear. "I'll kill all of you if I have to," He growled.

Ashstar sprang on him, slashing his ears.

Vally stumbled back. Blood trickled down his face. He bared his teeth.

Ashstar then sprang forward again, raking his claws down Vally's side. Blood sprayed his gray pelt and spattered on the ground.

Vally backed away even more.

Ashstar knocked him off his paws and pinned him down, putting a paw on his throat. "Give up!" He hissed.

Vally spat at him. He turned his head to look at his rogues. "Don't stand there, help me!" He screeched.

Scar sprang forward and leaped on Ashstar quickly. The tom unsheathed his claws and sank them into Ashstar's shoulders.

"I'll kill you," Scar hissed. He raised his paw, about to slash Ashstar's throat.

Jaywing leaped from the side and landed on Scar, clamping her jaws around his neck.

Ashstar struggled to his paws and saw Scar on the ground. Jaywing pinned him down. Scar was limp.

Jaywing leaped off of him and leaped towards Ashstar. "Are you ok?" She asked her father.

"Yes, I'm fine," Ashstar rasped.

Jaywing turned and bared her teeth at the rogues. Vally, Flame, and Brindle fled into the bushes. Their noisy paw steps was enough to scare away all of prey in the forest.

"Oh StarClan! Harestar's losing lives!" Mothwing cried.

Harestar was on the ground, laying in a pool of his blood. Whitetail raced down the mountain trail, a wad of cobwebs on her paw. She raced over to Harestar.

"This is terrible!" Whitetail whimpered. She gave Mothwing the cobwebs.

"Great StarClan, Harestar just lost two lives, and he's losing another

one!" Willowshine cried.

Ashstar bristled. He padded closer to Harestar. He lay on the ground, in a pool of his own blood. His body then shook, and his paws flailed in the air, then he fell still again.

Mothwing was shaking. "One, two, three, four, five," She murmured.

"Oh no," Gorsetail gasped. "How many lives does he have left?" He asked.

"Five," Mothwing choked out.

Harestar jerked awake again, this time, his paws didn't flail, and his body didn't fall limp. His flanks were rising and falling, and he was alive.

"He's recovered!" Willowshine gasped.

Harestar's eyes closed and he rested for a moment.

Paw steps sounded at the edge of ShadowClan territory. For one terrorizing moment, Ashstar thought that it'd be the rogues again, but instead, Ferncloud and Reedwhisker appeared. Two mice hung from Ferncloud's jaws. A squirrel was in Reedwhisker's jaws. Ferncloud gasped in surprise as she saw Ashstar. Reedwhisker's eyes widened in awe. Then their happiness faded as they saw Harestar lying in a pool of his own blood.

"What happened?" Ferncloud gasped. She dropped her prey on the ground next to Reedwhisker's, then raced over to them.

"What happened to Harespring?" Reedwhisker gasped.

"The rogues attacked us and Vally killed him," Ashstar explained. "He lost five lives," He added.

"Five lives?" Ferncloud gasped.

"I'm ok now," A low voice rasped. Harestar rose to his paws.

Antpelt raced from the bushes, cobwebs wrapped around his paw. He stared at Harestar. "Oh, was I too late?" He asked, his tail flicking.

"Harestar lost five lives," Ashstar told him. "Whitetail brought him cobwebs, and he's ok now," He meowed.

Antpelt gave his shoulder fur a couple of embarrasses licks. He looked up and saw Ferncloud and Reedwhisker. "Hey! You're back!" Antpelt purred. He raced over to them.

Ferncloud padded closer to Ashstar and touched noses with her brother. "I've missed you!" She purred.

"Where did you go?" Ashstar asked.

"I got lost during the flood," Ferncloud explained. "I'm so glad that I found Reedwhisker, Mothwing, Willowshine, and Duskpelt!" She purred.

"I know what happened," Ashstar sighed. "Crowfrost told me," He explained.

"Whitetail, Antpelt, Gorsetail, we're about to go home, so come to me," Harestar called in a raspy voice. His warriors gathered together in a group. Harestar padded over to Ashstar. "I hope everything works out for you," He meowed, his tail flicking. "Hopefully you can build a new ShadowClan and a new RiverClan," He sighed.

"Hopefully," Ashstar sighed.

"Well, me and my warriors are going home. May StarClan light your path," He meowed to Ashstar. The worn out leader turned to Crowfrost and Cloverfoot. "Thanks for finding my warriors," He purred.

"It was nothing," Crowfrost murmured.

"Well, you're welcome," Cloverfoot purred.

Harestar turned to leave, his warriors following behind him. Antpelt

and Whitetail were talking together, and Gorsetail was up at the front, walking beside Harestar.

"Make sure you get that wound treated!" Willowshine called after them.

Every cat sat there until the WindClan cats padded out of sight. A light rain began to fall and the sun had already sunk beyond the moor, the moon coming to take its place.

Ashstar turned to his warriors, water streaming down his whiskers and wetting his pelt. "Lets go home," He meowed.

"To your territory?" Cloverfoot asked.

"Well of course," Ashstar meowed firmly.

"Ugh, ThunderClan, always helping and being soft," Crowfrost muttered.

Ashstar felt a growl rising in his throat. He turned to glare at Crowfrost. "Then you go can sit out here in the rain if you want!" He hissed.

Crowfrost flattened his ears. "I'm just saying that ThunderClan always helps and acts like kittypets!" He growled.

"Why don't you just be glad for our help?" Jaywing growled. "If we didn't help you, you'd be out in the rain and the rogues would kill you. It's best if you come to our camp, and then stay for a few days until we decide who the next ShadowClan leader shall be," She spat.

"My daughter's right," Ashstar meowed. "So are you coming or not?" He asked.

"Alright," Crowfrost sighed.

Jaywing padded up to Ashstar's side. The two of them walked at the head of the group. Ivypool, Bramblehawk, Firestorm, Tigerheart, Crowfrost, Cloverfoot, Ferncloud, Mothwing, Willowshine, Duskpelt, and Reedwhisker followed. It seemed like ShadowClan and RiverClan would be growing as fast as WindClan. Duskpelt was

also expecting kits, and that was good news for RiverClan.

Chapter 64

Ashstar padded through the undergrowth. Willowshine, Littlecloud, Rust, Flower, and Tigerheart were in his group. Rust said that he had dreams of a tiger on a large rock, and Mothstripe insisted on bringing Tigerheart. They finally came out of the undergrowth and reached the clearing where the moor was underpaw, and where the moor stretched out. The mountain trail was visible just ahead.

"What happens if StarClan doesn't except Rust as ShadowClan's leader?" Flower asked.

"Then Tigerheart might try it," Littlecloud meowed.

Ashstar couldn't think about another Tigerstar leading ShadowClan. The last Tigerstar had done evil things, and what would Tigerheart do?

The moon was starting to come up, and shadows stretched across the ground and reached toward the cats as they padded towards the mountain trail. The moon's silvery light made all the cats' pets turn gray, and their eyes shone brightly.

A sharp yowl caught in Ashstar's ears. He thought nothing of it at first; he thought he'd just imagined it, but the rest of his patrol stopped dead in their tracks and looked around warily.

"What was that?" Willowshine asked, her eyes narrowed.

"Could WindClan or ThunderClan be getting attacked?" Tigerheart asked sharply.

"Calm down, it was probably the rogues getting attacked by a fox

maybe," Ashstar pointed out, hoping he was right.

"But the yowl would've been closer. That yowl sounded distant, like far off," Littlecloud pointed out.

Ashstar bristled, and with terror he realized that Littlecloud could be right. But what cats lived far off? He thought about the rogues in the lake territory. Not them, they'd be blocked by the mountains. He then thought about the tribe in the mountains. Could they be in trouble?

"Well, lets continue," Ashstar meowed. He padded up the mountain trail and felt rocks dig into his paws. He winced as he stepped on a sharp stone. The waterfall could be heard up ahead.

Stoneteller gasped in horror as he saw a large black tom with amber eyes. A russet colored she-cat slinked through the entrance, her amber eyes glowing with delight. The rest of Stoneteller's cats were sleeping, and Stoneteller was afraid of these cats finding them. Who were they? Ashstar had warned of rogues forcing them to leave their territory, and now Stoneteller got an idea of who these cats might be. More cats were behind them.

In a nest next to Stoneteller's, a white tom lay asleep.

"Ice, wake up, rogues!" Stoneteller hissed quietly.

Ice jerked awake. "Rogues?" He gasped. His eyes widened with horror. "Where?"

"They're coming in the entrance! Ashstar warned us about them!" He meowed.

Ice unsheathed his claws. "Then we have to fight with all our might and beat them!"

"The tribes weren't meant for killing other cats, we just have to give them a few scratches and show them who's boss!" Stoneteller growled. He rose to his paws and unsheathed his claws.

"What about the rest of our tribe? The prey-hunters aren't meant for fighting!" Ice pointed out. "We could outnumber the rogues with our

cats, but half of them don't fight!" He growled.

A hiss erupted from the entrance of the cave, and Stoneteller turned his head to see claws flash in the moonlight, then they cut into the shadows and a screech echoed in the cave.

"Ant!" A cat screeched out. Stoneteller gasped in horror as he realized that they had attacked Ant. He shot from the den without giving warning to Ice and leaped on the huge black tom. He felt himself land of the sleek-furred body, and sunk his claws into his shoulders. He wanted to sink his fangs into the tom's neck, but the tribe cats weren't allowed to kill others.

A huge russet paw knocked Stoneteller off of the black tom.

Stoneteller lay on the ground, panting, then caught a glimpse of his son's dark ginger pelt, then he saw a long scratch running down his flank. He scrambled to his paws and saw blood trickling from the wound. Stoneteller crouched over his son's body. "Ant!" He cried. He shook him roughly, and Ant finally opened his eyes. "Stoneteller, they're going to kill us all," He rasped.

"No, they aren't," Stoneteller told him. He looked at Ant, whose flank rose and fell. "Sit here and pretend you're dead, I'm not letting them kill you," He added. He turned around and saw the russet she-cat holding the scruff of his mate, Rain. She lashed and flailed in the other cat's jaws, but couldn't get the russet cat to let go of her.

A dark ginger tom came appeared in the cave entrance. "Kill her, Russetstar!" He yowled.

That russet colored she-cat must of been Russetstar. Stoneteller reared back and leaped through the air, heading towards Russetstar. He would not let this mange-pelt kill his mate!

A skinny black and white she-cat leaped at him, then knocked him to the ground. She sunk her fangs into his neck. Her claws dug roughly into his shoulders.

The weight was suddenly pulled off of him, and Stoneteller got to

his paws to see Ice pinning down the white and black she-cat. She struggled under Ice's powerful weight and Ice slashed at her face. The she-cat was able to get free of him, then dashed towards Cry.

Stoneteller padded over to Ice. "Thanks," He rasped.

Before Ice could reply, a horrible snap echoed in the cave. The snap made Stoneteller's heart stop, and his paws felt like stone. He turned to see Russetstar, a light gray body in her jaws. The body was limp and stained with blood. She had killed Rain.

Flower shot across the cave. She was Rain's mom, but was a bit old. She leaped on Russetstar and slashed at her ears, slicing one of them.

Russetstar easily batted her away. Then, when Flower was still on the ground, Russetstar leaped on her and pinned her down, then raised her paws and brought them down, slashing Flower's eyes.

Flower's screech echoed through the cave, and Stoneteller looked at Ice, then he nodded, and both cats leaped at Russetstar. This evil cat needed to be dead!

"Russetstar, look out!" A cat screeched. The black tom leaped in the way of Stoneteller's attack. Stoneteller's claws dug into the black tom's throat, and blood sprayed Stoneteller's light brown pelt.

The black tom gasped in surprise. Blood trickled from his mouth and he slumped on the ground, blood streaming from his throat and pooling around him.

Stoneteller didn't mean to kill him, he meant to kill Russetstar.

Ice was on Russetstar's back. "Don't think Crowstar is dead!" She hissed. She turned around and grabbed Ice's scruff in her jaws. Was she going to break his neck like she broke Rain's? Stoneteller didn't want to find out, so he shot towards Russetstar. He sunk his claws into her legs and sunk his fangs into her chest.

All of a sudden, fangs clamped around his neck, and he was drug off of Russetstar. He struggled from the grip and turned around to see a massive white tom. The white tom had blue eyes and black spots

breaking up the white fur around his eyes. He had a long black tail and his white pelt was stained with blood. For some weird reason, a name rung in his head. *Dark....Darktail...*?

"Surprised to see me here?" Darktail hissed. "It's time for you to die, you old fool!" He hissed.

"W-we used to be friends! I visited you in the twoleg place when I was a cave-guard!" Stoneteller choked out.

"Friends? I remember, but things change, Stoneteller!" Darktail hissed. He crouched and unsheathed his claws.

"Why are you attacking us?" Stoneteller gasped. A long time ago, Darktail had been his friend, telling him of the Clans. Now, Darktail was right in front of him, ready to *kill* him.

"You should be asking why I'm about to kill you!" Darktail snapped. "When you became leader, you never came to see me! I wanted to kill you, knowing that you didn't want to be my friend anymore! You broke my heart when I didn't see you. We were good friends before, and that was thrown down the drain, and I've realized that you were a fake friend to me!" Darktail hissed. He leaped on Stoneteller, pinning him against the ground. He raised a bloody paw.

"Darktail, I couldn't leave the cave when I became leader! I'm still your friend! I didn't want to make StarClan angry with me if I left the cave!" Stoneteller gasped.

"No, you can't go back, you can't undo the mistake that has already been made. You deserve to die!" Darktail hissed. He brought his paw down on Stoneteller's throat. Blood leaped into the air and stained Darktail's white pelt.

Stoneteller felt his body slump on the ground, then his eyes slowly started to close. He saw his blood pool around him, and the last thing he saw was a white body racing over to him. Then, his vision blurred and went black.

"

Chapter 65

Russetstar caught Ice's scruff in her jaws and she swung her head back and threw him across the cave. Ice's nose hit the hard floor roughly, and he felt a wet liquid trickle from his nose. He struggled to his paws and then saw a light brown body on the floor. Was that Stoneteller?

He ran over to the limp brown body. Blood pooled around Stoneteller and a gash was in his throat. Ice gaseped in horror. He was dead.

White fur was on Stoneteller's shoulder.

"Stoneteller," Ice breathed. Stoneteller had been his best friend for a long time. They'd been raised as kits together. A scratch burned on his shoulder and his ear stung like fire. He looked around him, seeing the dead bodies of Rain, Gray, Root, Moss, Fish, and Cry. He saw a large white tom with a black tail. He had blue eyes. Blood stained his paws.

Ice realized that they were losing. He then saw the black tom that Stoneteller had killed. He was alive again! But how?

A dark ginger tom was battling with Ice's mate, Wolf. Ice leaped through the air, landing at Wolf's side. He slashed the dark ginger tom's head and struck the tom's ears with his claws.

The dark ginger tom leaped on Ice and pinned him down, then sunk his fangs in Ice's throat.

Ice struggled under the tom's weight, then clawed at his belly with his hind paws. The tom wouldn't move, and Ice was struggling to breathe.

Wolf leaped on the tom and sunk her fangs into his neck. She pulled him off of her mate, and stood, panting.

Ice struggled to his paws and bared his teeth at the dark ginger tom, but then realized that the tom was dead. Pool streamed from a gash on his neck and blood pooled around him.

Wolf's ear was torn and trickled blood. She had a scratch on her cheek and a heavy bleeding scratch on one shoulder. Ice realized that all these cats would need healing, and right now he was the only cat that knew about healing.

"We... we need to call a retreat," Wolf pointed out. "More cats will die!" She panted.

"Well, maybe," Ice meowed.

"Maybe? Do you want more cats to die? Stoneteller died, and what If you die?" She asked, hurt edging her voice.

"Calm down. There's no need to worry about me getting killed," Ice soothed.

"I have every right to worry about you getting killed, I'm your mate!" Wolf snapped. She lashed her bushy tail. "Call a retreat before more cats die! Please!" She cried.

Ice realized that she was right. *I can't die, I'm the only one here who knows how to heal*!

Before Ice could open his jaws, a dark brown tabby tom leaped from the shadows and onto Wolf. "Want to call a retreat? Cowards, we'll kill you all!" He hissed. He raised a paw and brought it down to Wolf's throat. Blood sprayed the tabby's face.

"Wolf! No!" Ice cried out. He leaped at the brown tabby and pushed him to the ground, baring his fangs at him. He unsheathed his claws and sunk them into the tabby's eye, then roughly ripped them out. The tom screeched with terror. Blood and fur leaped into the air and a rounded piece of flesh that was stained with dark red blood.

The brown tabby scratched the hard cave floor with his claws and whimpered, then struggled to his paws. His right eye was missing and blood streamed from the socket and trickled down to his muzzle, staining his lips red and making blood drip from his

whiskers. He bared his teeth at Ice, then leaped at him.

Ice dodged quickly, then slashed the tom's legs, making him trip and slump on his side. Before the brown tabby could regain his footing, Ice leaped on him and sunk his fangs into his shoulder. He ripped off his fur and spat it on the ground, then sunk his fangs into the tom's throat.

The tabby struggled under Ice, then started to lash out at Ice, but his attacks got weaker and weaker.

Ice crunched harder on the tom's throat, then felt blood well in his mouth. He ignored its nasty metallic taste, then quickly pulled back from the tom, feeling a hard piece of flesh rip off. He tore out the other tom's throat and spat it on the ground. Dark red blood spilled from the organ and pooled around it, then Ice turned back to the tabby.

The brown tabby's fur was stained in blood, and the fur around his face and throat had been ripped and soaked in blood. A large patch of fur was missing from his shoulder. A chunk of flesh had been torn where his throat once was, and blood bubbled inside the dark gash.

Ice turned to Wolf, staring in horror at her limp body. He crouched by her. Her eyes were dull and her body was cold and limp. A large gash was across her throat and blood streamed from the wound, pooling around her. Maybe she was right, maybe Ice should call a retreat.

"Retreat!" His voice echoed through the cave. He felt a burning anger inside him, pain and fear mixed with it. He saw the fighting around him stop. Fire, his son, raced towards the entrance, then stood, looking at the blood sprayed cave.

Ant, Fire, Leaf, Star, Flower, Snowflake, Hawk, Grass, Cloud, Orange, Rock, Storm, Lightning, Morning, Bug, and Puddle all waited at the entrance with Fire.

Ice raced over to them, not wanting to look back, but he stopped to a halt and looked back at the evil cats.

Russetstar, Crowstar, which he'd gotten his name, and many more cats with blood soaked pelts. A large white tom with blue eyes and a black tail stood by a large gray she-cat. A small tabby gray tom stood beside Russetstar.

"Darktail," Russetstar called. She flicked her tail towards the white tom with a black tail. She then flicked her tail to the gray she-cat. "Mist, you fought well today. And Darktail, thanks for killing their leader," She praised.

Darktail puffed out his chest. "Thanks, Russetstar," He purred.

Ice felt anger bubble up inside him. Darktail killed Stoneteller?

"Leave this territory!" Russetstar hissed. "This cave is ours now!" She growled. She unsheathed her claws. "Try to take it back, and we'll kill all of you!" She yowled.

Ice turned and fled blindly across the mountain. Sadness and anger choked him.

Hawk and Snowflake exchanged angry glances, then looked at Ice. "We've lost our home because of you!" Hawk hissed, unsheathing his claws.

Ice remembered how he'd ripped out that Tabby's throat. "I know," He muttered.

Ant gave him a look filled with sympathy.

"We've lost our leader because of you! You should be ashamed of yourself!" Snowflake hissed, her blue eyes widened with anger.

Ice felt hurt claw his heart. He sat there, taking in their angry insults, and his anger was building. He finally turned on them. "I've lost more than you, ok?" He growled. "Do you think you could've saved Stoneteller? I lost my mate, I lost my best friend! I'm in pain!" He cried. He felt like tearing out their throats. "You-" Anger and pain choked him, and he couldn't talk anymore. "We've lost our home! We've lost our leader! We've all lost some cat we love!" He snapped. "And you're just sitting there blaming it on me!" He hissed. "Why don't you two just shut up and realize that you two

aren't the only ones suffering? We're all suffering, but you think the whole mountain runs around you, don't you?" Ice snapped.

Snowflake and Hawk stared at him, their eyes wide.

"There's other cats around you! And have you forgotten who's the deputy around here!?" Ice growled.

"We have no home, and we're out here in the cold, so I'm going down the mountain to live with twolegs in the lake territory," Hawk growled. He looked at his mate, Snowflake. "Lets leave them," He hissed.

"Good, go ahead and leave!" Ice snapped. Hawk's and Snowflake's shadows disappeared into the distance, then Ice was left with Flower, Ant, Fire, Star, Bug, Puddle, Leaf, Storm, Lightning, Cloud, Orange, Rock, and Morning.

Flower crouched on the ground, her eyes covered in scratches. "I can't see!" She whimpered.

Ice sighed and sat down. He sat in silence and listened to his cats whimpering in fear and pain. He felt his own wounds sting, but none of his wounds hurt as much as his heart did.

A light touch on Ice's shoulder made him start awake. Ice opened his eyes to see Fire, then saw Ant.

"Ice, where will we go?" Fire asked, his eyes dull.

"I don't know. We might as well ask the Clans for help," Ice meowed.

"I don't mind being a Clan cat!" Star meowed, her tail raising in the air.

"We should go down the mountain trail and ask them for shelter and help!" Puddle pointed out, his eyes shining.

"Do you think the Clans would help kill these rogues?" Ice asked. "They'd die trying! Did you see how many of us they killed?" He snapped. "Plus, the Clans are recovering from the rogues' last

attack!" He growled.

"But the Clans could take us in and we could live with the Clans!" Puddle meowed.

"Well, maybe you're right," Ice meowed. He stood up and looked at his Tribe. "All cats who want to join the Clans, come gather behind me!" He called.

Leaf, Ant, Flower, Puddle, Star, Fire, Morning, Cloud, Storm, and Lightning padded over to join him.

Orange looked at them. "Really? You'd leave behind everything just like that?" She gasped. She turned to Ice. "Are you going?"

Ice didn't know how to reply. Would he stay and help the Tribe live on?

"I'll go with the Clans," Ice meowed firmly. "And we'll go now," He meowed.

Orange bristled. "Why would you betray your tribe like that?" She hissed.

"Where else would we go? Would you rather stay out here and starve or get killed by the rogues?" Ice asked in a harsh tone.

Orange hesitated. "I...I'll come with you, but I'll stay with the Clans until these rogues are taken care of," She meowed.

Now, Bug, Rock, and Grass were left standing there, their eyes sparkling with confusion.

"Do you want to come with us or go live with twolegs?" Ice asked.

"We'll come, but we'll be like Orange and go once these rogues are taken care of," Bug meowed. Rock and Grass followed him.

"Then lets go now," Ice meowed. He padded across the snow, feeling his paws sink in. His pads felt cold and they ached every time he took a step. He felt his tail drag in the snow behind him and his head hung low. *I've lost everything, my home, my best friend, my mate*,

Ice thought.

Darkness edged around him; it was night. The moon was visible up in the sky even through the light fall of snow.

Ice sighed inwardly. What would happen to the Tribe now? Would the Clans even take them in?

Chapter 66

Ashstar, Flowerstar, Mothwing, Willowshine, Duskpelt, Reedwhisker, Sappaw, and Pinepaw all started to walk over to RiverClan territory. The river could be heard gurgling by.

Flowerstar looked grim, her head a bit low.

"Why aren't you happy?" Ashstar asked her. "You're the leader of RiverClan!"

"I- I'm expecting Rust's kits," Flowerstar muttered. "But he's in ShadowClan," She sighed.

Ashstar bristled. "What? Why didn't you think about this?" He growled.

"I love Rust, but," Flowerstar began. "I just wish he would come to RiverClan with me to see his kits be born," She sighed.

"Well, talk to Tigerstar about it and see if he'll allow you to have Rust," Ashstar meowed.

Flower's head drooped a little. "But what if he doesn't allow Rust to join my Clan?" She asked.

"ShadowClan is still nesting in my camp since we haven't chased the rogues off their territory yet," Ashstar meowed, looking to the side. "And you'll have to be careful because the rogues could try to take your territory, and you don't have many warriors," Ashstar pointed

out.

"Rust would be amazing if he was over here!" Flowerstar purred, her tail flicking.

"Yeah," Ashstar muttered.

RiverClan's camp was neat. It had many dens and a big clearing. A tall tree stretched to the sky and a hollow had been wounded under it with roots screening the den.

All of a sudden, he heard paw steps running towards them. A muscular white tom with a torn ear and blue eyes shot from the grass on the far side. His pelt was stained with blood.

Ashstar arched his back and unsheathed his claws. He hissed at the white tom and lashed his tail. For some weird reason, this tom's scent seemed sort of familiar.

"Ashstar! It's me, Ice! From the Tribe of Rushing Water!" The white tom cried.

Ashstar then gasped in surprise. "Ice? What are you doing here? You live in the mountains!" He added.

"The rogues from your old territory!" Ice cried. "They came in the cave and fought us! Most of us were killed," He whimpered.

"Is any other cat with you?" Ashstar asked.

Ice flicked his tail. "Y'all can come out now," Ice called to the bushes behind him.

More cats stepped out of the bushes. Ashstar recognized all of them. Flower, Ant, Fire, Leaf, Storm, Lightning, Cloud, Orange, Morning, Rock, Bug, Puddle, and Star. All of them were covered in scratches. Flower had scratches covering her eyes and blood trickled down her face and dripped from his whiskers and muzzle. Her ear was torn and two deep scratches were across her shoulder.

Ashstar heart stopped as he realized Stoneteller wasn't here. He knew that Rain was Stoneteller's mate, but she wasn't here. Flower

was Stoneteller's mother; Flower was pretty old. Ant was Stoneteller's son.

"Where is Stoneteller?" Ashstar gasped.

Ice's eyes turned dull and he looked at his paws. In fact, every cat's eyes turned dull, and they studied their paws, not meeting Ashstar's intense stare.

"He," Ice choked out. He looked up, his eyes reflecting a lifeless body as if he was playing through memories. "He was killed by Darktail," He whimpered. His voice was shaky and his eyes stared through Ashstar as if he could see past him.

Ashstar knew that Stoneteller was Ice's best friend. They'd grown up as kits together. He saw anger in Ice's eyes.

"Darktail," He snapped out the name. "He's such an evil cat!" He growled. "Killing other cats without mercy!"

Ashstar wished he could find Darktail and put his life to an end, but he knew it wasn't possible.

"Hawk and Snowflake blamed me for Stoneteller's death!" Ice hissed. "I let them leave and now they're kittypets," He growled.

"Wow, sounds like you've had a rough time," Ashstar sighed.

"We need your help," Ice added, blinking.

"To chase off the rogues?" Ashstar gasped. "We would lose many of our cats!" He growled.

"No, we need shelter. Some of us are staying until the rogues are gone, and some of us would like to stay... forever," He added.

"Well separate your apprentices and warriors," Ashstar meowed.

"What?" Ice asked. "We don't have those, but we can separate our Cave-Guards, Prey-Hunters, and our To-Bes," He meowed.

"Ok, well separate those," Ashstar sighed. "Put your Cave-Guards to

the right side, put your Prey-Hunters to the left side, and put your To-Bes in the middle," He ordered.

Ice nodded, then turned to his cats and instructed them.

Flower, Leaf, Fire, and Grass were on the right side. Cloud, Orange, Rock, Morning, Storm, Lightning, and Ant were on the left side. Bug, Star, and Puddle were in the middle.

"Mothwing, Willowshine, go out to fine some herbs and cobwebs for them," Ashstar ordered.

The two medicine cats rushed into the bushes.

"Shouldn't a warrior accompany them? What if they run into rogues?" Flowerstar asked, turning to Ashstar.

"I think they'll be fine," Ashstar meowed. He turned to Ice. "We might as well hunt. You must be starving," He meowed. He turned to Reedwhisker. "Reedwhisker, take Sappaw and Pinepaw hunting. Try to find as much as you can," Ashstar ordered.

The three cats headed off into the forest.

Ashstar turned back to Ice. "Well, we need to see what Clans you want to be in," Ashstar began.

Puddle jumped up. "I want to be in ThunderClan!" He mewed, his eyes shining.

"I'll be in ThunderClan," Ice meowed.

"I'll be in RiverClan," Storm meowed.

Lightning padded up to his brother. "I'll be in RiverClan, too," He meowed.

"I'll go to ThunderClan," Flower meowed.

"We'll go to WindClan," Cloud and Orange meowed.

"We'll go to ThunderClan," Fire and Ant meowed.

"And we'll go to ShadowClan," Bug and Star meowed.

The only cats left that hadn't made a decision were Rock, Grass, Leaf, and Morning.

"Do you know what Clan you want to be in?" Ashstar asked them.

"Uh, I'll be in ThunderClan," Leaf meowed.

"I'll go to ShadowClan," Morning meowed.

Rock sighed. "I'll go to WindClan," He muttered.

"And I'll go to WindClan as well," Grass sighed.

"Well, I guess that's settled," Ashstar meowed.

Reedwhisker returned. He was carrying a blackbird in his jaws.

Sappaw and Pinepaw each carried two mice.

"We'll have to share," Ashstar meowed.

"We caught more, but we'll have to go back and get it," Reedwhisker meowed after setting his catch on the ground.

"Go ahead and get it," Ashstar ordered, flicking his tail.

Reedwhisker turned, Sappaw and Pinepaw following him.

Mothwing and Willowshine appeared, cobwebs wrapped around their paws and herbs in their jaws.

"Let me help with healing," Ice meowed.

"What?" Willowshine meowed.

"I learned healing," Ice explained.

"But you were a deputy," Mothwing pointed out.

Ice sighed and sat down. "Well, never mind, I don't think I know any herbs down here," He muttered.

"Yes, so let us do the healing," Mothwing sighed, flicking her tail.

"You won't be able to be a warrior," Ashstar told Flower gently.

The creamy she-cat flinched. "So, what would I be, in a Clan?" She asked.

"An elder," Ashstar answered. "Our apprentices take care of the elders. They bring them food, bedding, water," Ashstar explained.

"I'm not sure I'd like being an elder. I serve my Tribe and stand up for them, no matter how old I am," Flower meowed.

"Well, this isn't a Tribe," Ashstar pointed out. "You're too old to be fighting and hunting. Something could kill you easily," He meowed. He had no idea how this old cat was still alive. She was older than Stoneteller, and Stoneteller had been pretty old.

"Alright, I'll be an elder. But if you go to fight the rogues, I'm going to fight with you. I'll die fighting them, I'll stand up for my Tribe," Flower meowed.

Ashstar sighed.

Mothwing moved over to Flower. "Alright, Flower, you're the last cat to get treated," She meowed gently. She looked at the scratches running deep across Flower's eyes. Her blue eyes were dark and red and swollen where the scratches cut into her eyes.

Mothwing patted cobwebs on the scratches and chewed up a herb. She spat out the poultice into the scratches on Flower's eyes.

Flower hissed and whimpered. "Ouch!" She muttered. "It stings!" She whimpered.

"Flower, I'm sorry but these scratches are infected," Mothwing meowed gently.

Flower's eyes dulled. Her blue eyes had redness swelling around the scratches.
"Do- do you have to *remove* my eyes?" She asked.

Mothwing flinched. "I'm not sure, but you are blind," She pointed out. "Let me get Willowshine," She padded off to where Willowshine was crouching, eating a mouse with Reedwhisker.

Flower slumped on the ground, putting her paws on her head. She started muttering under her breath. She began to whimper in pain. "I can't see, my eyes sting," She whimpered.

Ashstar looked over to where Ant sat. He looked sad and lonely. Ashstar padded over to him. He touched Ant's tail with his shoulder.

"Listen, I know you lost both your parents, but could you go and comfort Flower?" Ashstar asked.

"Ok," Ant meowed. He slowly got to his paws and padded over to Flower. He crouched beside her, tucking in his paws.

Ashstar watched at the two of the talked together, then he padded over to where Flowerstar crouched. She was eating a mouse. Ashstar began to eat the mouse with her.

Author's Note (Designs + Death)

I drew these characters myself! I hope you like them!

Crowstar:

[image]

Russetstar:

[image]

Flower:

[image]

Bramblehawk:

[image]

Ice:

[image]

Twistedpaw:

[image]

Tigerstar:

[image]

Fluffypelt:

[image]

Thistleclaw's death:

[image]

Ashstar losing his first life:

Honeyfern's death:

Spiderleg's death:

Chapter 67

"Thistlepaw, you shall now be known as Thistlepatch, StarClan honors your bravery and kind heart," Ashstar meowed. He stretched his neck forward to touch noses with the newly made warrior.

Amberpaw was next, then Slatepaw. Snowpaw had already earned his name: Snowbreeze

"Amberpaw, you shall now be known as Ambertuft. StarClan honors your skills," Ashstar meowed, touching noses with her. He finally turned to Slatepaw.

"Slatepaw, you've been the Clan's greatest help. You've been helping Flower a lot and you've been training with our new cats," Ashstar purred. "You shall now be known as Slateheart. StarClan honors your brave and kind heart," Ashstar meowed, touching noses with her.

"Snowbreeze! Thistlepatch! Ambertuft! Slateheart!" The Clan cheered.

Ashstar moved on to his three kits standing behind the four newly made warriors.

"Palekit, Moonkit, Smallkit, it's time that you finally became

apprentices," Ashstar purred. Happiness burst in his chest.

"Palekit, from this day on, until you have received your warrior name, you will be known as Palepaw," Ashstar meowed, touching noses with her. He moved to his son, Smallkit. "Smallkit, from this day on, until you have received your warrior name, you will be known as Smallpaw," Ashstar meowed, touching his nose to his son's nose. Finally, he reached Moonkit, the biggest of the three. "Moonkit, from this day on, until you have received your warrior name, you will be known as Moonpaw," Ashstar meowed, touching noses with his daughter.

All apprentices looked as if they would burst with happiness. Their eyes shone with delight and their tails thumped the ground happily.

"Jaywing, I think it's time for you to have an apprentice," Ashstar meowed, flicking his tail for her to come up to the High Ledge.

Jaywing climbed the rocks and padded over to him, her tail held high in the air.

"Jaywing, you will be the mentor of Palepaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to this apprentice," Ashstar meowed, flicking his tail. He watched as Jaywing touched noses with Palepaw, then Ashstar turned and looked over the crowd of cats. A ginger she-cat stood out to him.

"Squirrelflight, I think it's time you had another apprentice," Ashstar pointed out, flicking his tail.

Squirrelflight stepped out of the crowd, a surprised look on her face.

"Squirrelflight, you will be the mentor of Smallpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to this apprentice," Ashstar meowed. He purred as he watched his son pad over to Squirrelflight. The two of them touched noses.

"Fluffypelt," Ashstar called out.

Fluffypelt stepped from the crowd. Her tail flicked as she climbed the rocks and padded over to Ashstar.

"Fluffypelt, you will be the mentor of Moonpaw, and I know you will pass on your knowledge to this apprentice," Ashstar meowed. Fluffypelt reminded Ashstar of his other daughter, Softpaw. She was killed before she even turned into a warrior. Flashbacks started to play in Ashstar's mind.

/Flashback/

Wolfpaw slashed Softpaw's throat, Her scream of terror was cut off as blood instantly streamed from the gash. Her bright green eyes dulled and she slumped on the ground, blood pooling around her.

/End of flashback/

Ashstar snapped back into reality, hearing his Clanmates cheer the apprentices' names. He felt dizzy and felt feverish. His vision clouded and he felt shaky on his paws, like he was swaying.

"Ashstar, are you ok?" A voice made Ashstar bristle.

Ashstar looked up to see Cinderheart.

"You should be congratulating your kits," Cinderheart pointed out.

Ashstar closed his eyes. He felt as if he couldn't talk. "Oh....I," He mumbled, the dizzy feeling taking him over. "Know," Ashstar finished in a choking sound. His vision darkened and he slumped on the ground.

Ashstar woke up in the medicine den, feelings his own body heat. His heart was jumping in his throat, and his chest felt tight.

"Ashstar!" Twistedpaw meowed. He jumped towards him.

"Twistedpaw?" Ashstar muttered. He remembered that the tom had gone to the MoonCave to earn his full medicine cat name. Ashstar was never told his new name though.

"It's Twistedfoot now," Twistedpaw informed him. "What happened?" He asked.

"I don't know," Ashstar choked out. He felt a burning feeling rise in

his throat.

Twistedfoot put a paw on Ashstar's forehead. "A fever. Just as I'd thought," He meowed. He turned. "Mothstripe! Are you back with the wet moss yet?" He called.

"I'm here!" A muffled voice came from outside the den.

Besides Mothstripe's muffled voice, Ashstar could hear anxious murmuring outside. All of a sudden, burning liquid pushed its way up Ashstar's throat. He opened his jaws and started to vomit all over the floor of the medicine den. It was a disgusting color and spread in waves, it even touched Twistedfoot's paw.

Twistedfoot's eyes widened and he jumped back. "Mothstripe! He vomited!"

Mothstripe burst through the den entrance. "Great StarClan, it's a river of cats out there!" She hissed. She padded over to Ashstar. She avoided his puddle of vomit and dropped the wet moss beside him.

"He needs to be taken to the river and wash off. We don't need him vomiting all over the medicine den," Mothstripe meowed. Her amber eyes flashed. "Can you get up, or do you need our help?" She asked.

Ashstar's mind felt blank. There was a moment of silence, except for the quiet murmur of anxious voices outside the den. A paw touched his head.

"Hey, Ashstar?" Mothstripe prompted. She seemed to have an irritated tone in her voice.

Ashstar wished Alderheart were here. He felt rage building inside him. A rage he couldn't control. He leaped up, feeling his paws slip in his own vomit. He turned and glared at Mothstripe. "Don't be irritated with me!" He hissed. He unsheathed his claws.

Mothstripe's eyes brightened with fear. "Ashstar!" She gasped.

Ashstar leaped on her, slashing at her ear. He tore through her ear and winced as blood leaped out at his face, stinging his eye.

A gray shape faded beside Ashstar. His throat was cut open and his amber eyes glowed. He looked at Ashstar with happiness in his eyes. "Kill her," He growled in a whisper.

Another shape faded beside Ashstar. A golden tom with amber eyes and scars all over his body. His throat was also cut open and bleeding slightly. When his blood hit the ground, it stayed there. Were these cats real? Ashstar couldn't even tell since he was sick.

Ashstar recognized these cats. Rowandust and Wolffang! What were they doing here?

Rowandust glared at Mothstripe. "Kill her!" He hissed.

Ashstar couldn't do it. He regained control over his body and stepped away from Mothstripe. He turned and shoved past Twistedfoot. He slipped in his vomit and shot from the den. He shoved past all the cats that were crowded around the den. He caught a glimpse of Jaywing's horrified face. He shot across the camp and towards the entrance, feeling his chest get tighter.

Ashstar slumped on the ground. The quiet murmur of the river filled Ashstar's ears. He got to his paws and padded over to the river and vomited again. He moved farther up river and took a drink. He lifted his head, feeling dizzy. He sat down, then felt a tail touch his shoulder. Had some cat followed him here? Jaywing? Mothstripe?

"Ashstar!" A voice hissed. Wolffang faded into view.

Ashstar gasped in surprise. He could see his son, and he wasn't even dreaming. He looked different. His fur was ruffled and he had a scar across his eye that went down and across his mouth. He had black eyes with glowing amber slits. His ears were torn his paws were bloody. A wound that hadn't been on his throat before was there. The torn wound on his throat had blood still trickling from it.

"Why....why are you here?" Ashstar asked.

"Aren't you glad to see me? I'm your son!" Wolffang growled. "Why didn't you kill Mothstripe when you had the chance?" He asked.

"I couldn't! I don't want to become a monster again!" Ashstar

meowed. He felt a tight feeling in his chest once more.

"You could kill Mothstripe and no cat would know that it was you. Your cats trust so much that they'd risk their lives for you. Have you seen Millie and Alderheart? They died to save you," Wolffang added.

"Shut up! You're just trying to convince me to kill Mothstripe!" Ashstar growled, unsheathing his claws. He lashed his tail.

"Mothstripe broke the warrior code! She deserves to die! She abandoned me!" A new voice hissed.

Ashstar turned around to see Rowandust. Of course he'd want Mothstripe dead.

More shapes faded into view around Ashstar.

Hawkfrost, Brokenstar, Darkstripe, and other cats that Ashstar didn't really recognize.

"Join us!" Hawkfrost hissed.

Chapter 68 Allegiances + Sorry For Not Updating In A Long Time!

[image]

ThunderClan:

Leader: Ashstar

Deputy: Squirrelflight, apprentice- Smallpaw

Medicine Cats: Mothstripe

Twistedfoot

Warriors:

Graystripe

Jaywing, apprentice- Palepaw

Cinderheart

Ferncloud

Mossheart, apprentice- Falconpaw

Ivypool, apprentice- Willowpaw

Bramblehawk

Sootwing

Firestorm

Fluffypelt, apprentice- Moonpaw

Thistlepatch

Snowbreeze

Ambertuft

Slateheart

Apprentices:

Willowpaw

Falconpaw

Moonpaw

Palepaw

Smallpaw

Tribe Cats:

Puddle

Ice

Flower

Fire

Ant

Leaf

WindClan:

Leader: Harestar

Deputy: Gorsetail

Medicine Cats: Kestrelflight

Rabbittail

Warriors:

(btw Tawnypelt moved to ShadowClan)

Doveclaw

Eaglefeather

Fernwhisker

Whitetail

Antpelt

Tribe Cats:

Cloud

Orange

Grass

Rock

ShadowClan:

Leader: Tigerstar

Deputy: Tawnypelt

Medicine Cat: Littlecloud

Warriors:

Crowfrost

Cloverfoot

Ebonyfur

Queens:

Dawnpelt (expecting)

Tribe Cats:

Bug

Star

Morning

RiverClan:

Leader: Flowerstar

Deputy: Reedwhisker, apprentice- Pinepaw

Medicine cats: Mothwing

Willowshine, apprentice- Sappaw

Warriors:

Rust

Apprentices:

Pinepaw

Sappaw

Queens:

Duskpelt (Mother to: Curlkit and Podkit)

{{***Ok I made a mistake, Duskpelt was supposed to be Duskfur, but u know what, I'll just keep Duskpelt***}}

Tribe Cats:

Storm

Lightning

Rogues:

Leader: Vally

Deputy: Dirt

Tooth

Blood

Rock

Snow

Claws

Gravel

Thorn

Talon

Chapter 68

[image]

Ashstar woke up to the sound of dripping. He opened an eye and gasped in shock. He was in a large cave with puddles around him. A howl echoed around the cave, and ripples spread out in the puddles around Ashstar.

Snow blurred outside the cave and it piled up outside the cave, then a shadow appeared in the entrance. The shadow had pointed ears. A long snout appeared on the side, and tiny howling could be heard. Then, there was a low growl, and a large dog-like creature stepped into view, a smaller dog-like creature in it's jaws. This creature set down its pup and flattened its pointed ears and curled its lip back, revealing large, pointed fangs.

Drool dripped from its big mouth. It had a thick, fluffy gray pelt and the creature seemed a bit skinny, but it was tall and huge, and had piercing amber eyes that glowed with hate.

Ashstar didn't even know what this creature was called, but a familiar name rung in his mind. Mist swirled around him as the creature lunged, its jaws opened so much that it looked as if it could swallow Ashstar whole.

GASP Ashstar woke up, his heart pounding. He was in the forest, still laying under the tree that he'd last fallen asleep under.

"Ashstar, they're coming for you," A voice whispered in his ear.

Ashstar unsheathed his claws and turned around, only to see Wolffang. "What do *you* want?" He growled.

"Those were wolves, incase you forgot. You named me after one, didn't you?" Wolffang growled. "They'll tear your Clan apart!" He hissed, lifting his paws and baring his fangs.

Ashstar didn't want to show his fear of that creature. He rolled his eyes, and his neck fur bristled. "Yeah, right, they're in the mountains, right? They'd never travel down here, and my Clan could easily defeat them," Ashstar growled.

"Don't act like these creatures are a small group of mice! They're fiercer than dogs!" Wolffang growled. "So get ready, make your mentors train their apprentices extra hard!"

Ashstar flattened his ears. "Why do you care what happens to my Clan?? You never cared about us when you were alive!" He hissed, standing up and looming over his ghostly son.

Wolffang shrank back. Then he rose to his paws. "They....came for me...I saved you," He meowed, before fading away.

Ashstar was left confused. 'They'?! What did 'they' mean? A second thought crossed his mind. "I saved you."

Every night, Ashstar would be haunted by those.... those wolves... he'd have dreams of them. He didn't understand anymore. His stomach hurt more than his brain, which was full of thoughts. He hadn't gone back to his Clan, he'd stayed by this tree for about a moon, watching the river flow, and watching blossoms slowly drift down in front of him. Being away from his own Clan gave him peace, and he didn't have to worry about fighting and arguing. He was surprised a patrol hadn't passed through here yet, when all of a sudden...

"Ashstar!" A voice called.

Was that Jaywing? Ashstar just watched his own reflection for a moment. Jaywing's reflection appeared in the river.

"Ashstar, what are you doing here?" She growled. "You had us all

worried sick!" She growled.

Ashstar shivered, ignoring her. Then, he saw an image flash in his mind, a wolf that had Jaywing all bloody and clamped in its jaws. He sat up, gasping for air. He turned around and saw a look of concern on Jaywing's face. Of course she was worried for him.

"Do you feel any better?" Jaywing asked.

Ashstar shook his head. "Wolf..." Was all he could choke out.

"Wolf? What? Those creatures are only spoken in kits' tales," Jaywing pointed out. She didn't understand...

"They're... they're coming! Wolffang warned me! We have to move away from here before they come and kill us!" Ashstar hissed to her, unsheathing his claws. He stood up now, tearing at the grass.

"They live in the mountains, it's not like they'd come down here," Jaywing pointed out.

All of a sudden, the grass parted and the huge creature stepped out, the wolf from his first dream, the wolf with the cub. The cub had grown, standing right by its mother. It was small, as big as an adult cat.

Ashstar instinctively jumped in front of his daughter and bared his teeth at the wolves. They didn't even look scared of him, he seemed like easy prey to them, like a mouse...

Ashstar dove under the wolf's belly, then felt its jaws clamp around his body. The blood drained from him, and he realized how fierce these creatures were. Ashstar yowled with terror and pain, fear of losing a life. Wolffang had been right...

Jaywing yowled with terror and tried to save him, but the wolf cub jumped on her, pinning her to the ground.

Ashstar twisted in the wolf's jaws and lifted his paw, slashing the wolf's muzzle. Blood spattered the ground and the wolf let him go. Ashstar hit the ground, pain gripping his head. He scrabbled to his paws and saw the wolf above him, baring it's teeth. It reared back,

and Ashstar was ready to feel the pain. He closed his eyes, hoping that losing this life would be quick...

No pain was felt, so he opened his eyes, confused. A dark gray figure was on the wolf's head. A cat!

Ashstar then realized who it was... "Wolffang?!" He gasped. Why was he here, and why'd he help Ashstar?!

"Wolffang?!" Jaywing gasped.

Wolffang growled and sunk his fangs into the wolf's ear, then thrust his head back and ripped off the ear. The wolf howled in pain and blood spattered the ground. "I've got it distracted, Ashstar, run and get help!" Wolffang yowled.

Ashstar turned and watched as Jaywing slashed the wolf cub's chest, then it whimpered and ran off into the bushes. "Jaywing, run and get help!" He yowled.

Jaywing looked at him. "But I need to help you fight!" She meowed.

"Then if you want us all to live, get help, please!" Ashstar yowled to her. He watched her take off into the bushes.

"Run and get help with her!" Wolffang yowled to him. The wolf grabbed him by his back paw and brought him to the ground.

"No! I won't let your spirit fade!" Ashstar growled. He lunged at the wolf as it was about to kill his son. He sunk his claws into its head and sunk his fangs into the back of its neck, his back paws' claws sinking into its muzzle.

"Ashstar!" Wolffang gasped.

Ashstar felt the wolf shake its head, then he was flung into the air. He landed in a thorn bush. Thorns poked at his pelt and blood trickled through his fur. He couldn't sit here and rest, though, he had to fight, but he was tired.

Ashstar gasped with pain when he moved his paws. He scrabbled to his paws and burst his head through the thorn bush, feeling like

claws had scratched all across his face and ears. He tugged himself from the prickly mess and looked back to see tufts of his fur stuck in the bush. He crawled back to where Wolffang was, limping. He then saw Jaywing, fighting the wolf. Graystripe and Bramblehawk were attacking its sides, and Ferncloud was on its back, her claws sinking into its fur.

Blood stained the wolf's fur and it tried to grab Jaywing, yet she dodged out of the way of its gaping mouth.

Ashstar didn't see Wolffang. Where did he go?? He shot forward and dove under the wolf's belly, his claws raised. He felt hot, wet blood spatter his face and he saw blood leak from the wolf's stomach. He rolled onto the grass, weak with exhaustion. He lay on the ground, his belly exposed. He saw the wolf shake Ferncloud of its back, then it whimpered and ran off.

Ferncloud lay on the ground, a patch of fur torn off her shoulder. The flesh had been torn there and blood trickled from the wound. She staggered to her paws and limped over to Ashstar. "Ashstar! Are you ok?!" She gasped.

Ashstar staggered to his paws and nodded. He limped over to the rest of his Clanmates, seeing them all battered up. Jaywing's ear was torn and fur was missing from her paw.

Graystripe had a bite mark on his shoulder that was trickling blood. He padded up to Jaywing and licked her ear. "Are you ok?" He asked.

"I'm fine," Jaywing replied, panting.

"Ashstar!" Bramblehawk gasped. "Why did you run off?!" He asked, his tail flicking. "You've been gone for half a moon!"

"The important thing is, he's back," Ferncloud meowed, flicking her tail. She limped around him, and rested her tail on his shoulder.

Ashstar saw that Bramblehawk had a scratch on his chest that trickled blood. Fur was missing from the side of his head.

"The important thing is that we all get to camp to let our wounds

get treated," Ashstar stated.

"Alright," Bramblehawk grumbled.

Ashstar was in the medicine den. He still didn't feel to good. He rested his head on his paws and let sleep take over. He woke up in a dark forest where mist swirled around him and between the trees. The Dark Forest....

Wolffang appeared in front of him.

"Wolffang!" Ashstar gasped. "What happened?"

"I had to leave when your other Clanmates arrived. That actually confused the wolf when I disappeared," Wolffang explained.

Another question came to Ashstar's mind. "What did you mean by "They came for me, I saved you."?" He asked.

Wolffang dipped his head. "The Dark Forest cats came to me in a dream and told me that if I didn't want to get my family killed, I'd have to do terrible things. They controlled me, and I didn't want you to die," Wolffang meowed. "I did what I thought was right. I thought I was doing something good, but finally they told me their plan and they took control of me. That's why I killed my sister and almost killed you. I couldn't escape from them and the only way was to kill myself," Wolffang meowed.

Now Ashstar felt terrible. His son was only trying to protect him, yet he got tricked in the process. "Why didn't StarClan accept you?" He asked.

"They thought I'd done all that stuff on purpose, and they didn't know how I could get tricked by Dark Forest cats so easily," Wolffang answered.

"What?!" He hissed. "StarClan are stupid!"

"StarClan are wise, they did a wise deal sending me here," Wolffang sighed. "Because I can tell you the Dark Forest's plans," He meowed.

Ashstar gasped. "Are they planning anything yet?" He asked.

"No, but I hope they don't come to fight you," Wolffang meowed. He started to fade.

"Wait! No! I have more questions!" Ashstar mewled. He felt like he was falling through a pit of nothingness. He woke up, bristling.

Mothstripe startled awake. "Ashstar, is everything ok?" She asked.

Ashstar shuddered. "Wolffang isn't evil," He meowed. He closed his eyes and fell asleep again.

Chapter 69

[image]

Ashstar felt the cold night breeze ruffle his fur. He dug his claws into his branch and winced as he saw Reedwhisker, Mothwing, Pinepaw, Sappaw, and Rust pad into the clearing. Where was Flowerstar??

Ashstar clawed down the trunk and scrabbled to a halt in front of Reedwhisker. "Where's Flowerstar?!" He asked, worried.

"Willowshine is taking care of her. She's having her kits," Reedwhisker explained. "So I'll be the announcer tonight," He added.

Ashstar turned away and climbed up the trunk of the Great Oak. He saw Harestar trembling on his branch and he looked skinny. There were swelling and angry red wounds on his white stomach and his fur wasn't groomed properly. Cobwebs still patched the wounds and yellow pus folded around the wounds. He didn't look like he was in good condition. Ashstar wondered why he was even at the gathering. Ashstar sat on his branch and saw Tigerstar looking out across the Clans, his amber eyes distant. Ashstar then raised his tail for silence. He waited as the talking died down.

"The prey is running well for ThunderClan," Ashstar announced. "Reedwhisker, I hope you're getting along well in the territory. Are the rogues a problem?" He asked.

"No, not for us. Our hunting as been excellent and we're planning to make the Tribe Cats warriors," Reedwhisker explained. He flicked his tail.

"We'll train the Tribe Cats for a bit and give them proper Clan names," Ashstar meowed.

"Same with us," Tigerstar meowed. He opened an eye. "Harestar, are you gonna make an announcement?" He asked.

Harestar coughed rapidly and Ashstar cast a worried glance at the other leaders.

"I'm fine, don't be worried about me," Harestar snorted. He held a paw to his stomach and clenched his teeth.

"Are you ok?" Ashstar asked, worried for the WindClan leader.

Harestar crawled over to him, panting, his eyes clouded with pain. Bark scraped the infected wounds and pulled off the cobwebs and opened the wounds back up. Blood began to ooze from the wounds. A sticky liquid covered the brown tom's paws. "I have three lives left," He rasped.

Ashstar gasped. Why would he give away an important secret?! But he needed to help the tom.

"Kestrelflight! Harestar needs you!" Ashstar hissed.

Harestar coughed rapidly. He rested on the branch, his head lay still on Ashstar's paws. His breathing was shallow and fast, and his ribs were showing as if he hadn't eaten in days.

Kestrelflight and Gorsetail climbed up the trunk. Kestrelflight grabbed Harestar's scruff while Gorsetail supported his shoulder. Ashstar joined in and helped lead them down the trunk.

Ashstar leaned on Harestar's side and helped them carry him across the clearing.

"What happened to him?!" Squirrelflight gasped.

"Not sure, but I think his wound is infected again!" Kestrelflight hissed.

"What? Shouldn't he be in camp?" Ashstar hissed, flicking his tail. "If you knew he was sick?" He prompted.

Kestrelflight flashed him a guilty look. "Well, sorry, I didn't think straight!" He wailed.

"You're a medicine cat for StarClan's sake! Surely you'd notice

symptoms of infection, right?" Ashstar retorted, glaring at him.

"For StarClan's sake, lets just get him back to camp!" Ketrelflight hissed, ignoring Ashstar's question. He got a better grip on Harestar's scruff and huffed as he lifted his head, keeping Harestar's head from dragging in the dirt.

"Let me help," Gorsetail offered, taking Harestar's scruff instead.

Kestrelflight took the time to glare back at Ashstar. "Well I'm not a StarClan cat, I don't notice everything," He flashed back. He turned his head. "Ashstar, I'm going to ask if you could go back to your Clan, please," Kestrelflight growled slightly, avoiding his gaze. He glanced at him.

Ashstar sighed. "No I'll help you, for Harestar's sake," He muttered. "Looks like you need a little help anyways," He pointed out. They passed ShadowClan, and Crowfrost was glaring at Ashstar.

"Oh really," Crowfrost sighed. "ThunderClan helps every time something happens, its as if they think that StarClan will repay them for their kindness," Crowfrost muttered in annoyance.

Ashstar stopped in his tracks to glare at Crowfrost. "Well at least *we* aren't as black-hearted as you!" He hissed, lashing his tail.

"What? Were you offended by that? Oh I'm sorry, I should keep my mouth shut sometimes," Crowfrost taunted.

Oh he's asking to get that smirk clawed off his face! Ashstar leaped on Crowfrost and slashed his ears. "No cat taunts my Clan and gets away with it!" Ashstar hissed, slashing the black tom's cheek. Blood spattered the ground.

Clouds rolled across the sky, dark and gray, and a light rain began to fall. The clearing began to get darker than before, and Ashstar couldn't see in front of him.

"Ashstar!" Kestrelflight hissed. "Now look what you've done!"

Ashstar backed off of Crowfrost. "I only wanted to give him a simple scratch," He hissed into the foggy darkness. All of a sudden, a

pawful of claws caught him on the cheek. Ashstar staggered back into the darkness, unknown to who was attacking him. He could smell Crowfrost's scent in the black fog, and blindly lashed out around him, not knowing where Crowfrost was. He hit fur and felt his claws rip through flesh and felt blood well on his claws, then a body crashed onto him.

"Say goodnight, Ashstar! This is your fault!" Crowfrost hissed. "You've started something I'll finish," He hissed, raising his paw, claws unsheathed.

Ashstar shrunk back onto the ground. "No!" He hissed, pushing his hind paws into Crowfrost's belly. He threw the tom off of him and then they tussled on the ground, rolling over and over in a tangle of fur and claws.

Cats screeched around them, and tension was heavy in the air, and at any moment Ashstar knew that something bad could happen to the other cats. All of a sudden, they both tumbled down a hill and mud slicked against Ashstar's fur and rain damped his pelt. Then, Ashstar felt cold droplets of water splash around him as they both splashed into the cold water of the river.

Ashstar tried to claw his way out of the water, but paws dragged him back down. Claws hooked into his pelt. "Stop, Crowfrost, this is over!" He hissed. He couldn't see, blackness surrounded his vision and he couldn't tell which way was up or down. Ashstar felt claws dig into his pelt and he was shoved deeper under the water. He shoved his claws into Crowfrost's skull and pushed him down then swam up, breaking the surface of the water and gasping air, the thick mist still hung everywhere and Ashstar struggled to get to the shore. He scrambled onto the shore and panted, then scrambled to his paws. He felt his way through the fog, hearing distant shrieks.

The fog was clearing, and clouds still covered the moon. The clearing was drenched in shadows and everything was quiet except for the quiet gurgle of the river.

"Ashstar!" A yowl caught his attention and Ashstar turned, tail twitching. He saw Squirrelflight heading towards him.

"Every cat has seemed to find their way back," She explained. "But I'm not sure what happened when everything literally went black," She glared at him.

"Crowfrost is gone, haven't seen him since the fight we had in the river," Ashstar explained, flexing his claws.

"Yes, and Ambertuft fell in the river," Squirrelflight hissed, glaring at him. "We were able to pull her out with the help of Reedwhisker," She explained. "But Eaglefeather from WindClan went missing and I'm trying to help Doveclaw and Fernwhisker find him," She added.

"We found him!" A voice called. Fernwhisker bounded over, pointing with his tail. Doveclaw was crouching beside Eaglefeather. The young tom was shaking and was soaked with water.

They both walked over to Ashstar and Squirelflight.

"What happened to Crowfrost?" Doveclaw hissed, glaring at Ashstar.

"Crowfrost isn't a worry to us, he's in ShadowClan," Fernwhisker spat. He lashed his tail and glared at her.

"Not sure," Ashstar replied. "He must of followed ShadowClan home," He meowed.

"Well, if he did, then lets head back home," Squirrelflight meowed. She waved the WindClan cats good-bye and turned back to Ashstar. "Lets go."

Chapter 70

Moons had passed and in all that time came chaos. Tigerstar and his Clanmates and gotten attacked by Crowfrost, who was actually siding with the rogues. Dawnpelt had been badly injured and Tigerstar had lost a life. Dawnpelt's kits were with them too. Mothstripe had been working hard to heal them. Smallfeather, Moonshine, and Palewhisker were sitting vigil for the night, and Ashstar had been waken up by the soft whispers of the wind.

The air was a crispy cold, like every other night in Leaf-Bare, and Ashstar stretched, not being able to fall asleep. He got to his paws and padded silently from his den, seeing the long shadows of his kits stretching in the clearing. He sat down at the edge of the High Ledge, looking up in the sky and hearing crickets. Memories of his other kits crossed his mind. *Stoneheart, Softpaw, Bunnypelt, Wolffang.....*

Ashstar opened his eyes as a scent wreathed around him.

"Beautiful night, isn't it?"

That voice... sounded so familiar.. yet so distant..

Ashstar turned to see Stoneheart. The gray tom was transparent with stars in his fur. His eyes shone a dull blue, and he looked a lot younger than he was when he was still alive. Stars swirled around

his paws, and he turned to Ashstar.

"Stone-Stoneheart," Ashstar breathed.

"You don't have to whisper, they can't hear you," Stoneheart meowed, whiskers twitching. He flicked his tail to Moonshine, Smallfeather, and Palewhisker. "This is a dream," He explained.

Ashstar shifted his paws. "How?" He asked. He swished his tail. "Well never mind, StarClan is confusing," He joked, whiskers twitching. "Why did you come?"

"To deliver a prophecy," Stoneheart meowed, closing his eyes. "I wish I could still be in ThunderClan. The other Clans are growing nicely," He purred.

"I agree," Ashstar purred. "What's the prophecy?" He asked, ears pricked.

Stoneheart opened his eyes and faced his father, his eyes shining brighter than before. "Beware the black crow, for if you kill it, it will bring grief and pain, only then will the eagle's talons get sharper."

"What does that mean?" Ashstar hissed. He was confused. Stoneheart was beginning to fade away. "Wait! What do you mean!"

Ashstar had been worried about the prophecy all day. What could the crow mean? What could the 'eagle's talons' mean? He'd told Mothstripe about it, and she said she'd think about it. She said the crow could mean Crowfrost or Crowstar. She was also sure that 'it will bring grief and pain' meant that ThunderClan would have to make sacrifices to get rid of the rogues. *I was thinking about leading a fighting patrol to fight the rogues and try and get rid of some.... but..*

Ashstar padded from his den and stood on High Ledge. "Let all cats old enough to hunt join beneath the High Ledge for a Clan meeting!" He called. Cats began to gather around the High Ledge and murmured quietly.

Ashstar raised his tail for silence. Then he gazed around his Clan.

"I've had enough of the rogues, and I'm sure you can agree with me, right?"

Cats yowled agreement, pelts bristling and tails lashing.

"At Sun-high, we will attack their camp, and we will have them beg for mercy!" Ashstar hissed. "I will lead a battle patrol, and I will take...," He gazed around his Clan. "Graystripe, Cinderheart, Ferncloud, Ivypool, Bramblehawk, Fluffypelt, Thistlepatch, Snowbreeze, Ambertuft, Willowbrook, Slateheart, and Smallfeather," He meowed, lashing his tail. He jumped down and yowled for the battle patrol to follow him. *I'm on my second life...*

Ashstar led his patrol through the undergrowth. The sun was climbing down the sky, making the sky an orange color. The clouds were starting to turn red, and the stars were starting to sparkle in the sky. Rogue scent flooded this part of the forest, and Ashstar clawed his way through some thick bushes. He smelled the heavy scent of rogue past some thorn bushes and could hear the soft gurgle of the river. It must've curved all the way over here. Ashstar turned back to the patrol. "Are you ready?" He asked his Clanmates.

The cats nodded in agreement.

Ashstar pushed through the thorn bushes, then felt his paws slip on mud. He yowled as he tumbled and fell into water. The fast current tried to drag him away from his Clanmates, but Graystripe quickly darted forward and got his scruff in between his jaws. Ashstar climbed up the bank with the help of Graystripe.

Ashstar's Clanmates gathered on the bank of the small river.

"It's small enough to jump across," Ashstar meowed, looking at the small gap. He leaped across and motioned for his Clanmates to jump. It was getting darker, and Ashstar backed away from the bank so he could make room for his Clanmates. All of a sudden, a body slammed into Ashstar. He yowled as he recognized the scent of Crowstar. Claws slashed at his cheek, and Crowstar shoved him deeper into the undergrowth until they were in a clearing. They were close to the Mountain Trail.

"Get off him!" Cinderheart yowled, leaping on Crowstar's back and ripping at his ear.

Ashstar hissed in Crowstar's face and lashed out at his muzzle. Blood spattered his muzzle and stained the large tom's black fur. Ashstar clamped his jaws around Crowstar's paw as he lashed at him. The tom leaped off him and shook off Cinderheart, knocking her into a ginger rouge.

Crowstar veered away into the midst of the battle, disappearing in the tangle of pelts and lashing claws.

Ashstar was confused as to how and why Crowstar's rogues were here. Was this what the prophecy meant? If Crowstar was here, then so was Russetstar and the rest of the rogues.

Ashstar spotted Graystripe fighting a large white tom with a long dark tail. That must've been the cat that Tigerstar had talked about when he returned to the Clans. Ashstar leaped on the tom's back, digging his claws into Darktail's back. Darktail lashed at Ashstar viciously, his claws catching his muzzle.

Graystripe struggled to his paws and slashed at Darktail's legs. The rogue turned around and slammed his paws into Graystripe's head, making him collapse on the ground.

Ashstar slashed at Darktail's muzzle, slicing through his flesh and nose. The tom yowled in pain and limped away into the battle. Ashstar scrambled to Graystripe and helped him get up.

"Are you ok?" He asked.

"Yes," Graystripe rasped. Blood trickled from his mouth and nose, and scratches covered his muzzle and pelt.

"I think you should go back to Mothstripe," Ashstar suggested.

"I can still fight!" Graystripe hissed, glaring at him. A rogue tumbled over to them, and Graystripe leaped on the rogue, hissing.

Then, Ashstar spotted Vally. The large tom was fighting Smallfeather, and past that, a rogue was fighting with Cinderheart.

Ashstar raced forward, wanting to help his son, but a russet-colored cat blocked him. Russetstar.

"Well, we meet again, Ashstar," Russetstar snickered. Her left ear was torn and a scratch followed down her ear to her face, stopping at her eye. Blood trickled from her face. "I bet you wonder why we've sided with these rogues?"

Ashstar lashed at her, his claws hitting her muzzle. Russetstar lashed back, her claws striking down Ashstar's ear. He felt his ear tear down the middle, and blood trickled down his face.

"We attacked the cats in the Mountain and forced them to move out! And of course they did, weak creatures. Darktail killed their weak leader, too!" Russetstar hissed, leaping on Ashstar and pinning him down.

"Move!" Ashstar hissed. "My son needs me!" He growled, slashing her chest.

Russetstar tumbled back, blood dripping from the scratches. "Then have it your way, we'll take over your Clans as well," She hissed, slamming her paws, claws unsheathed on his head. She leaped on him and wrestled him to the ground, her claws sinking into Ashstar's throat.

Ashstar tried to break from her grip, but her claws slashed his throat, and his blood pooled around him. Everything then went dark.

Ashstar woke in StarClan. Firestar was in front of him, along with Brindleface, Softpaw, Stoneheart, and Bunnypelt.

"You've lost a life," Firestar meowed, getting to his paws and padding closer to Ashstar. "Rest for a while before we send you back," He insisted.

Ashstar bristled. "Send me back now! I have to save my son!" He hissed.

"We need to heal your wound," Firestar growled.

Ashstar looked down slightly and could feel the burning pain of the gash in his throat. He could see it slowly closing up and stars twinkled in the fur around his wound as it slowly closed.

"Hurry up," Ashstar rasped. Firestar touched his nose to Ashstar's nose and everything turned a bright white.

Blackness faded into blended color as Ashstar could feel himself waking. The bright colors faded dull and then Ashstar could see again. He felt dizzy, but scrambled to his paws, looking around. Cats were still fighting. Ashstar spotted a dark ginger rogue pinning down Cinderheart. *No!* He rushed forward, leaping over to where to was, but then a large tom leaped out of nowhere, blocking his path. *Vally.*

Ashstar reared and leaped on Vally, but the tom met his attack by slashing his paws at Ashstar's face, his claws hitting his muzzle. Ashstar clung onto the large tom's chest fur, tearing out clumps of fur and slashing at the skin.

Vally slammed his paws into Ashstar's head, slamming his head on the ground roughly. Ashstar's chin hit the ground hard, and he felt his teeth tear his lip.

"Get out of my way!" Ashstar hissed as Vally pinned him to the ground. He couldn't see past Vally and had no idea what condition his mate was in.

A brown cat crashed into Vally, pushing him away from Ashstar. Bramblehawk! Fluffypelt and Graystripe also ran over to fight the tom. They wrestled Vally to the ground, biting and clawing at him angrily.

Ashstar felt thankful for their help, then raced over to where the rogue and Cinderheart were. He leaped on the rogue, hissing. He slashed his claws across the tom's throat and watched as he collapsed on the ground, blood pooling around him. Ashstar kicked his body away and turned back to Cinderheart, gasping. "No!" He yowled. She was dead, her throat torn open and one of her eyes closed and bloody.

Ashstar's paws were sticky with his mate's blood as he crouched beside her, whimpering. *No, this can't be real! She can't be dead!* He thrust his paws under her limp head. Her body was cold and stiff. Dry blood trickled from her mouth. "No," Ashstar murmured. His own wounds burned twice as bad now.

Anger burning inside him, Ashstar turned around and raced over to where the his Clanmates were fighting Vally. They were surrounding him. Ashstar saw that Vally was dead.

Every cat seemed to be very injured.

"We need to retreat," Bramblehawk panted. "This battle is getting out of control. These rogues are no longer fighting normally, they're trying to use killing blows," He explained.

"No! We can't retreat now! Not when their leader is dead," Ashstar hissed.

"Do you want more cats to die?" Fluffypelt hissed, lashing her tail. "If we keep fighting until Crowstar and Russetstar are dead, we'll only have a few survivors," She growled.

Ashstar glanced around, seeing that most of the rogues were dead, but they still wouldn't win, not with Crowstar and Russetstar in the way. Fluffypelt and Bramblehawk were right.

"So will you call off the retreat or no?" Graystripe prompted.

Ashstar stared at his paws. His heart felt heavy. *Cinderheart is dead, and more will die. I'll call a retreat...* He lifted his chin. "ThunderClan, retreat!" He yowled. He watched as his Clanmates nodded at him in relief and raced back towards the river. Ashstar turned around and raced back to Cinderheart's dead body. He grabbed her scruff and hauled her up on his back. She deserves to be buried! He raced back to the river, feeling sick suddenly. He imagined Jaywing's reaction to knowing her mother was dead. Moonshine, Smallfeather, and Palewhisker would be devastated as well. This was their second day of being a warrior, and now their mother was dead.

Ashstar stopped as he heard the quiet gurgle of the river. It was

dark out here, and he couldn't see. He felt blind as he stumbled through the undergrowth. *Now I know how Jayfeather feels*, he thought. One of his paws slipped through thin air as Ashstar padded forward more. He'd have to jump since he'd reached the bank. *How will I get Cinderheart's body across*? He grabbed her scruff and reared, then swung his head forward, throwing her limp body across the river. He didn't hear a splash, so she must've hit the other side. Ashstar heard a dull thud. Yep.

Ashstar then leaped across the river, and could smell his Clanmates as well as blood. All of a sudden, he heard a yowl and a splash. Some cat must've fallen in the river. He turned around, confused as to who it was. It could've been a rogue or his Clanmate, but it was too dark to tell.

Ashstar grabbed Cinderheart's scruff and stumbled into the undergrowth once more. He couldn't tell where he was heading, then he slipped in mud and started to roll down a hill, his body slamming hard in a ditch. His wounds burned bad now. *I give up...* Ashstar curled around his mate's cold, stiff body and waited for darkness to close around him as he fell into the dark pits of sleep.

Chapter 71

Ashstar woke up. It was a new day, and he felt like the battle with the rogues had been a dream. He'd been hoping it was a dream, actually. Cinderheart was dead still.

Ashstar stumbled to his paws, weak. He grabbed Cinderheart's scruff and climbed up the ditch. He stumbled out onto the ground in pain. Ashstar scanned the forest. The undergrowth was thick here, and for a second Ashstar didn't remember where he was. He stumbled into the undergrowth, Cinderheart's pelt catching on twigs and thorn bushes. *I've got to get home*.

The smell of cats hit Ashstar's nose. Some were scents he'd never smelt before, and some were the scents of his Clanmates. A patrol padded from the undergrowth all of a sudden.

"Ashstar!" Jaywing cried, leaping forward. She stopped dead as she saw Cinderheart's limp body. "Cinderheart!"

Squirrelflight's eyes widened. "No!" She cried. She leaped forward.

Ashstar's vision started to darken. The grief was too over-whelming. He collapsed on the ground, tired from his wounds.

Ashstar woke in the medicine cat's den. Mothstripe was tending to his wounds.

"Oh finally, you're awake," Mothstripe meowed. "You've been asleep for a while, and we have company," She explained.

"What? Who?" Ashstar hissed, bristling.

"Whitewing, Berrynose, Blossomfall, Poppyfrost, and Rosepetal have returned. Remember when they went missing after the fire?" Mothstripe meowed. "They also found Lizardpaw, Mallownose, and Petalfur from RiverClan; Larkwing, Slightpaw, and Sedgewhisker from WindClan; and Scorchfur and Snowbird from ShadowClan. They also brought two other cats with them. Smoky and Coriander," She meowed. "Whitewing said that they found each other. She said that she found Smoky and Coriander, who were wanting to come with them because they said their home had gotten destroyed. Sadly when they traveled through the mountains, Briarlight died on the journey," Mothstripe explained.

"When did they get here?" Ashstar asked.

"Today, right after the sun was up. They were devastated to hear that Cinderheart had died in the battle. But when you went missing, Squirrelflight gathered and patrol to look for you," Mothstripe meowed. She stared at her paws. "Instead of finding you, they found Slateheart. She was dead," She meowed, her voice cracking.

"How did she die?" Ashstar asked.

"She drowned. She was found by the bank of the river. She must've fallen in the river and was too weak to swim. After all, she'd been fighting," Mothstripe sighed.

Ashstar felt grief spread through his body. It's my fault she died. I heard a splash and didn't think twice about it. He curled up in his nest.

"Get some rest, Ashstar," Mothstripe soothed. "And by the way, Mossheart is expecting Bramblehawk's kits," She meowed.

Ashstar curled up tighter as she padded away. Darkness then enfolded around him.

Oh StarClan, what now? I lost Stoneheart, Bumblestripe, Softpaw,

Wolffang, and now my mother? What now? My father? My sister? Jaywing lashed her tail. She hadn't been feeling great since the battle. It had been three moons since the battle with those dumb rogues, and she still asked StarClan *why?* Jaywing pushed her mouse to the side. *I guess I should spend more time with my kin before I lose more of them.*

Jaywing noticed that Falconflight was eyeing her. He then started to pad over to her, his head low.

"Hi Jaywing," He meowed happily. "You still don't feel good?"

Jaywing glared at him. "Obviously. My mother died. How's life for you?" She grumbled. She felt as though Falconflight liked her. After all, the young tom always wanted to share prey with her, hunt with her, and occasionally asked how she was doing.

"I'm sorry if I upset you. I know you're still mourning over your mother," Falconflight apologized. "I would be upset too if I lost my mother," He meowed.

"And your mother is my daughter," Jaywing grumbled. "And your father is dead, in the Dark Forest," She sighed.

Falconflight's eyes widened. "What? My mother told me my father was a rouge!" He hissed. He glared at the medicine den. "She lied to me?"

"What would you expect?" Jaywing sighed.

"I feel weak having my mother being a medicine cat. Maybe that's why my sister is so soft?" He joked.

Jaywing got to her paws, bristling. "Talk bad about my daughter again and I might claw your ears off!" She hissed. Feeling hurt, she stalked over to the camp entrance. *I need some time alone, away from everyone.*

Chapter 72 Allegiances

ThunderClan:

Leader: Ashstar- Pale gray tom with dark blue eyes and a torn right ear

Deputy: Squirrelflight- Flame colored she-cat with green eyes and a white paw

Medicine cats: Mothstripe- Pretty golden she-cat with a fluffy long tail

Twistedfoot- Brown tom with a twisted paw and green eyes

Warriors:

Jaywing- Gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes and a torn ear

Ferncloud- Dappled gray she-cat with green eyes

Ivypool- Silver-gray tabby she-cat

Whitewing- Small snowy white she-cat with green eyes

Berrynose- cream colored tom with a stump for a tail

Blossomfall- Tortoiseshell and white she-cat

Bramblehawk- Dark brown tom with black stripes and yellow eyes

Sootwing- Gray she-cat

Fluffypelt- White she-cat with brown spots and blue eyes

Firestorm- Flame-colored tom with blue eyes and a gray ear-tip

Thistlepatch- Gray and white she-cat with strange violet eyes

Snowbreeze- White tom with blue eyes

Ambertuft- Dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Falconflight- Dark brown tom with blue eyes

Willowbrook- Gray and white tabby she-cat

Moonshine- Black and silver-white she-cat with blue eyes

Smallfeather- Pale yellow small tom with blue eyes

Palewhisker- Black and white she-cat

Smoky- Gray and white tom

Coriander- Tortoiseshell and white she-cat with amber eyes

Queens:

Mossheart- Black and silver she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Bramblehawk's kits: Breezekit, Ripplekit, Flamekit)

Elders:

Graystripe- Gray tom with yellow eyes

Flower- Blind, very old tortoiseshell she-cat

Poppyfrost- Pale tortoiseshell and white she-cat with a tiny stub for a tail

WindClan:

Leader: Harestar- Brown and white tom

Deputy: Gorsetail- Mottled pale gray tabby tom

Medicine cats: Kestrelflight- Mottled gray tom with white splotches like kestrel feathers

Rabbittail- Light brown tom with green eyes and a short tail

Warriors:

Eaglefeather- Golden tom with a scarred muzzle, apprentice- Slightpaw

Antpelt- Brown tom with one black ear

Larkwing- Pale brown tabby she-cat

Sedgewhisker- Light brown tabby she-cat

Apprentices:

Slightpaw- Black tom with a flash of white on his chest

Queens:

Doveclaw- Gray she-cat with white paws and blue eyes (Mother to Antpelt's kits: Windkit, Thornkit, and Featherkit)

Elders:

Whitetail- Small white she-cat

RiverClan:

Leader: Flowerstar- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: Reedwhisker- Slender black tom, apprentice- Beetlepaw

Medicine cats: Mothwing- Dappled dark golden she-cat

Willowshine- Sleek thick-furred dark gray tabby she-cat

Sapbriar- Milky white she-cat with gray paws

Warriors:

Rust- Large dark brown tom with amber eyes and a torn ear, apprentice- Brightpaw

Duskpelt- Brown tabby she-cat, apprentice- Icepaw

Pineshade- Dark ginger tom with a black splotch on his pelt, apprentice- Splashpaw

Curlfeather- Pale brown she-cat

Podlight- Sturdy gray and white tom

Mallownose- Light brown tabby tom, apprentice- Lizardpaw

Apprentices:

Brightpaw- White she-cat with blue eyes

Splashpaw- Gray tabby she-cat

Beetlepaw- Black tom with brown paws

Icepaw- Fluffy white she-cat with ice-blue eyes

Lizardpaw- Light brown tom

Queens:

Petalfur- Gray and white she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Mallownose's kits: Jaykit, Brackenkit, and Owlkit)

ShadowClan:

Leader: Tigerstar- Big dark tiger-striped tabby tom with amber eyes and a torn ear

Deputy: Tawnypelt- Mottled pale tortoiseshell she-cat, apprentice- Juniperpaw

Medicine cat: Ravenbreeze- Small black she-cat

Warriors:

Ebonyfur- Black tom with green eyes, apprentice- Strikepaw

Dawnpelt- Cream furred she-cat

Scorchfur- Dark gray tom

Cloverfoot- Gray tabby she-cat, apprentice- Sleekpaw

Apprentices:

Juniperpaw- Black tom

Strikepaw- Brown tabby tom with a white belly and amber eyes

Sleekpaw- Golden yellow she-cat with green eyes

Queens:

Snowbird- Pure white she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Scorchfur's kits: Beekit, Berrykit, and Yarrowkit)

Elders:

Littlecloud- Small, thin brown tabby tom with blue eyes

Rogues:

Leaders: Russetstar- Dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Crowstar- Large black tom with blue eyes

Deputies: Darktail- Big, glossy white tom with black spots around his blue eyes and a long black tail

Blood- Dark ginger tom with a white tail tip

Medicine cat: Arch- Brown tabby tom with a white belly and paws

Cats:

Crowfrost- Black and white tom

Stone- Dark gray tom with green eyes

Spike- Large light gray tom

Shimmer- Black and white she-cat

Moon- Silver she-cat

Viper- Tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

Tooth- Sturdy gray tom

Switch- Black and white tom

Redwillow- Mottled brown and ginger tom

Shrewfoot- Gray she-cat with black feet

Oakfur- Small brown tom

Smokefoot- Black tom

Slash- Large dark brown tabby tom

Chapter 72

Mothstripe woke up in a dark place, the smell of death hitting her nose. Mist curled around the gray trees and crawled across the short, brown grass. A dark shape was heading towards Mothstripe. Then, a cat stepped out. Mothstripe gasped as she saw a dark ginger tom with amber eyes and white-tipped tail.

"Alderheart?" Mothstripe gasped.

Two deep faded gashes were cut into Alderheart's throat. Dark blood welled on the wounds, and his eyes were black with thin amber pupils. "Heh, surprised to see me here?" He asked, griping the grass with his claws.

"But how?!" Mothstripe whimpered. "I thought.... I thought you were nice!" She hissed, shrinking back.

"Oh, but only the Clans thought that," Alderheart sighed, closing his eyes. "I killed Stoneheart on purpose and sacrificed myself for Ashstar so I could earn my place down here, getting trained by the rogues," He meowed. "If you don't mind me telling you, I also let Sorreltail die."

"No!" Mothstripe whimpered. "How? Why? What made you turn so evil?" She asked, feeling sick.

"Nothing. Just realizing that the Dark Forest is better than ThunderClan. I wanted to train as a warrior, but StarClan made me a medicine cat. I took the training of the Dark Forest cats and in return for their training, I had to kill two cats in ThunderClan," Alderheart grumbled, lashing his tail.

"You're a monster! I trusted you! You acted like a fatherly figure to Twistedfoot! Where did all your love go for your Clan?" Mothstripe growled, bristling.

"I never had any love for my Clan," Alderheart snapped. "I just found a way to fake it."

A huge dark brown tabby tom with a white underbelly and black eyes with thin ice-blue pupils.

"Hawkfrost?" Mothstripe gasped.

"Oh Mothstripe, just know that bad times are coming. Most of your kin will die," Hawkfrost snapped. "The Dark Forest is growing."

Coming back from the Gathering, Ashstar led his Clan home. I must do something about the rogues. The other leaders discussed getting rid of them, claiming that it's better to do nothing than something. They were preparing for the upcoming battle. WindClan agreed to help ThunderClan with the rogues.

"Ashstar?" A soft voice echoed in Ashstar's den.

Ashstar opened his eyes in the gloomy darkness. Squirrelflight was standing in the entrance of his den. "What is it?" He asked.

"When will we attack the rogues before they cause any more problems?" Squirrelflight hissed. "After all, Russetstar and Crowstar were what caused us to move away from the Lake," She pointed out.

"No, that was Wolffang's fault," Ashstar hissed. "Not Russetstar's or Crowstar's. But don't be worried, the battle will be tomorrow."

"So, Ashstar, we've agreed to fight together against the rogues," Harestar rasped.

Ashstar leaned close. "Yes," He nodded. I'm on my last life. But I have to stop Crowstar. He turned away form Harestar, who had Antpelt, Eaglefeather, and Fernwhisker with him.

"I shall now choose the cats who are coming to the battle with me!" He yowled. "Jaywing, Squirrelflight, Ivypool, Ferncloud, Blossomfall, Bramblehawk, Sootwing, Firestorm, Thistlepatch, Ambertuft, Falconflight, and Palewhisker," Ashstar smoothly called out their names. "Fluffypelt, I'd like for you to watch over the camp."

"Yes, Ashstar," Fluffypelt meowed softly.

"Battle Patrol!" Ashstar called. "Follow me and Harestar, now!"

Ashstar led his cats through the undergrowth, heading through the thorn bushes and squeezing into the clearing where the Gathering Tree was. Ashstar padded across the clearing, Harestar and the rest of his cats following behind him. They were under the shade of the large tree. It's blossoms were curled and shriveled on the ground, beginning to turn brown. Ashstar leaped across the slightly frozen river, waiting for his Clanmates to cross.

After the other cats had crossed, Ashstar parted his jaws to taste the air. He could see his breath billowing in front of him in the night air. This was RiverClan's territory. Shadows stretched in front of him, hiding the path in front of him. Ashstar sneaked forward, finally tasting rogue scent. The scents of Crowstar and Russetstar were fresh here.

Padding through the forest more, Ashstar heard the close gurgle of the stream near. Thorn bushes came into view, and Ashstar squeezed through them, careful of the stream. He felt his paws slip on cold mud. Ashstar could see the other side of the bank and leaped across, then waited for Harestar and his Clanmates.

"We've gotta be quiet," Ashstar whispered to them, his tail drifting above the ground. "Lets go."

Harestar nodded to him.

Ashstar flicked his tail for his Clanmates to follow, then they crouched and sneaked through the forest. He saw the rogue's camp.

"Their camp is up ahead," Ashstar whispered. He could smell the heavy scent of rogue. Brambles were weaved among the thick trunks of the oaks. Vines and mud were packed into the brambles to seal the openings in the brambles. There were an entrance to the camp. Two cats were guarding the entrance: Darktail and a dark ginger tom. Ashstar turned to his Clanmates, who were all cramped together.

"We'll have to kill the guards," Ashstar whispered.

"Wait, kill Darktail? We can't! He's impossible to defeat!" Squirrelflight hissed. "He's tough," She added, tail lashing.

"Squirrelflight, Jaywing, and Ivypool, distract the guards, I'll lead everyone else into the camp and start the attack," Ashstar meowed.

Squirrelflight nodded to Jaywing and Ivypool, then crawled through the undergrowth in the rogue's sight.

"Intruders!" Darktail hissed. "Blood, you deal with them, I'll warn the other rogues!" He turned and raced into the camp.

Mouse dung! Ashstar cursed under his breath and flicked his tail to his Clanmates, racing into the camp. "ThunderClan, attack!" He yowled. He flung himself on a gray tom, sinking his claws into his shoulders and pinning him against the ground.

The tom's hind legs pushed into Ashstar's belly, flinging him backwards.

"WindClan, attack!"

Then, Ashstar saw Harestar leading his cats into the camp. Ashstar scrambled to his paws, but heard Crowstar throwing orders.

"Crowfrost, Viper, guard them!" Crowstar hissed.

Ashstar was confused. What did the rogue mean by "them"? He leaped back on the gray tom, slashing at his ears with his paw.

Then he slammed his paw hard on the tom's head, claws sheathed. The tom stumbled backwards, stunned.

Ashstar jabbed his paws into the tom's side, knocking him to the ground. Ashstar pinned him down, about to deal the killing blow, but sharp claws dug into his back as a weight slammed on his back.

Ashstar tried to twist around, but the tom under him dug his claws into Ashstar's shoulders. Ashstar hissed and met the black and white tom on top of him with vicious swipes to his muzzle. The tom leaped off. Ashstar twisted back around and grabbed the gray tom by the head. Ashstar sank his jaws around the tom's neck and felt claws dig deep into his shoulders. He felt blood well in between his fur. The tom fell limp in his jaws.

Ashstar looked up and saw Palewhisker fighting Darktail. The pale she-cat was slashing at the tom, but he avoided all her blows, then struck out at her ears. Ashstar raced forward and slashed at Darktail's flank, distracting him. Palewhisker lashed at Darktail's thick-furred chest, tearing out a clump of fur. Skin showed beneath the fur, and Palewhisker slashed again. Darktail coughed up blood, then ducked away from their blows.

Palewhisker nodded to Ashstar. "Thanks," She murmured.

"No problem," Ashstar purred. He leaped away from her and leaped on Crowfrost, who was guarding a den. A small tortoiseshell tom was with Crowfrost. Ashstar slashed at Crowfrost's muzzle, blood welling on his nose. He dealt a hard blow to his cheek before Crowfrost shoved him off, knocking him aside. The tortoiseshell tom leaped on Ashstar, claws slashing the air. Before his blows could meet Ashstar's face, he raised his paws in defense. Crowfrost dug his claws into Ashstar's shoulders and pulled his paws away from his face by clamping his jaws around Ashstar's paws.

Ashstar hissed in pain. The tortoise shell tom slashed at his face, his claws slashing his muzzle and nose. Ashstar felt blood well on his muzzle, and his nose stung with pain. He shoved the tortoiseshell tom off of him, then twisted around and slashed at Crowfrost's ears. The tom hissed as Ashstar's claws struck his ear, carving a deep nick into it. Crowfrost howled with pain as blood dripped into his eyes,

the stumbled away from Ashstar.

The tortoiseshell tom was back on his paws, leaping through the air towards Ashstar, claws outstretched.

Ashstar ducked under the tom's belly and lifted his claws, feeling his claws rip through the tom's belly fur all the way down to the tail. Blood spattered Ashstar's face as the small tom collapsed on the ground, blood pooling around him. He then fell limp on the ground.

Ashstar limped over to the small den and peeked through the shadows, seeing Oakfur, Shrewfoot, and Smokefoot. The each had a long scratch running across their shoulder. "Why are you here?" He asked.

"The rogues imprisoned us," Oakfur rasped. His ribs showed. "You have to beat the rogues," He meowed.

"That's what we're doing," Ashstar meowed.

"May StarClan be with you," Shrewfoot murmured.

Ashstar backed away from the den, seeing Ivypool and Squirrelflight fighting Russetstar. They were driving back the russet-colored she-cat with blows to the muzzle and ears, then Ivypool reared and slammed her paws into Russetstar's head, knocking her down. Then Russetstar dodged their blows and struck out a paw, striking Squirrelflight's chest. Then, Ivypool dove under Russetstar, slicing her belly open. Russetstar yowled with pain and jerked on the ground, blood pooling around her. Then the she-cat fell limp.

Ashstar felt hope swarm inside him. *We can win this*!

"Russetstar is dead!" Panicked meows rose from the rogues.

"Ashstar, don't think you've won," A voice hissed behind him.

Ashstar turned to see Crowstar and Darktail. Crowstar had Jaywing pinned to the ground, his claws sunk into her neck fur. Darktail was beside him, probably guarding Crowstar.

"Jaywing!" Ashstar gasped. "Let her go!" He hissed to Crowstar.

"Only if you do me a favor," Crowstar slurred. His blue eyes glowed with delight as he saw terror spark in Ashstar's gaze.

"And what would that be?" Ashstar asked, tail flicking.

"Call off your cats. Tell them to stop fighting my cats," Crowstar hissed. "I've told my rogues that when you call your cats off, they'll stop fighting," He added. He rolled his eyes. "And then only you and me fight. I want to see your strength in a death battle."

"Are you crazy?" Ashstar hissed. "I'm not calling off my cats!"

"Oh but you will," Crowstar hissed, lifting his chin. "Or else Jaywing gets hurt," He growled. He nodded to Darktail. The large white tom put the tip of his claw on Jaywing's leg, then began to press hard. Blood began to well from the wound, and Jaywing whimpered with pain.

"Please stop!" Ashstar yowled.

"Then do as I asked," Crowstar snapped.

Ashstar looked around. His Clan was winning this battle very clearly. Only a few rogues remained, which were Crowfrost, a black and white she-cat, a silver she-cat, a mottled brown tom, a black and white tom, and a large light gray tom. They were all bloody and battered and Ashstar's Clanmates had them backed up against the bramble wall, hissing. But was winning this battle more important than Jaywing? Ashstar turned back to Crowstar, bristling.

"ThunderClan, stop!" Ashstar called into the chilly night air.

The fighting around him stopped. Ashstar turned around and saw his cats backing away, confused. They stared at him. "Why'd you call us off?" Squirrelflight hissed.

"I had to," Ashstar meowed, shifting his paws.

"He's battling me alone in a death battle!" Crowstar yowled. He

jumped off Jaywing and Darktail held back Jaywing.

"Hey!" Ashstar hissed. "You agreed not to hurt her!" He growled.

"Don't worry, she's only watching the battle," Crowstar soothed. He unsheathed his claws and leaped on Ashstar.

Ashstar lifted his paws in defense, but Crowstar twisted in the air, landing beside Ashstar and slashing at his flank. Ashstar hissed and ducked, swiping a paw at Crowstar's chest. Blood spattered on the grass and Ashstar swerved sideways and clamped his jaws around Crowstar's hind leg, making the rogue tom fall to the ground. Ashstar slammed his paws into Crowstar's chest, making the rogue gasp in surprise. Ashstar pinned him to the ground, putting a paw to his throat. "You made this easy," Ashstar hissed.

"Oh yeah?" Crowstar growled. He shoved Ashstar backwards, tearing out clumps of Ashstar's belly fur. Blood welled on the scratches.

Ashstar felt his paws knock from underneath him as he got up. He slipped in his own blood and swiped blindly at the air. Claws slammed into his belly, and he could feel them tearing at his flesh. Blood trickled through Ashstar's fur, then Ashstar yowled and exploded into the air, leaping on Crowstar.

Shocked, Crowstar didn't have time to defend himself as Ashstar struggled him to the ground, pinning him down. Ashstar lifted his paw, then slashed Crowstar's throat, blood spattering the grass and staining Ashstar's claws and paw. Crowstar gasped with pain, then as fast as a snake, struck Ashstar's throat with his claws. The black cat's head rolled back limply as Ashstar backed away from him, his breathing turning shallow. *No*!

Crowstar smiled weakly, blood pooling around him and trickling from his mouth, then he twitched and fell limp, his blue eyes dulling.

Ashstar collapsed on the ground as the rogues yowled around him.

Darktail dropped Jaywing, his gaze dark, then ran out of camp.

Jaywing cried out in pain and fear and ran over to her father. "No! Ashstar, hang in there! I'll get someone to get Mothstripe!" She gasped.

Ashstar lay on the ground, feeling hopeless as his last life was beginning to drain from him. "No, there's no time. I'm going to die anyway," Ashstar rasped. He felt blood welling up in his throat and could feel it on his tongue. "But don't worry, Jaywing, you'll do fine without me."

"No! Hang on!" Jaywing whimpered. "Squirrelflight!" She yowled. Her Clanmates gathered around as they realized what was happening. "Please, someone get a medicine cat!" She cried.

The ShadowClan prisoners padded from their den, their gazes filled with grief as they saw that Ashstar was dying.

"Don't. I'll die anyway," Ashstar rasped. The WindClan cats looked on with grief.

Ashstar felt his vision darkening. "Jaywing," Ashstar rasped. "Promise me you'll do good without me." Ashstar coughed up more blood and watched as it splattered on the ground.

"I- I..." Jaywing choked on her wounds.

Palewhisker padded forward and touched noses with Ashstar, then rested her tail on Jaywing's shoulder. "Don't worry Ashstar, we'll take good care of your Clan," She meowed, her voice cloaked with grief.

Ashstar looked at his daughters. They'd grown into fine warriors, and so had Jaywing's kits. Ashstar closed his eyes as darkness folded over them, then he woke up in a completely different place.

"Welcome to StarClan, Ashstar."

Author's Note

Ok guys I'm finished with this book now. Not sure how long this took, but I'd say about a year? It might seem sad that I'm ending this book, but Ashstar's gotta die at some point. ;_; But thanks for the reads! This is my most popular story, I'm guessing everyone just loves Ashfur. Don't worry though, I'm creating a new book. It's a sequel to this book. It'll be called Sharptalon's Mist. I've been planning on what will happen in the book for a long time. It might not get as much reads as this book (probably since Ashstar is dead oof).... eh, the new book I'm creating will probably have a ton of reads too lol. Ok bai

It's Ya Boi, Uh-- Ashfu- STAR

I made some stuff on flipaclip from this book.

This is a Ashstar and Wolffang moment from chapter 68

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Hope y'all enjoy this thing

Question

Should I remake this book?

Of course I'll keep the original version, but I was thinking about remaking this book entirely. Instead of making Ashfur turn good at some point, I'll just make him be evil the whole time. And I'm not gonna make it as long as this one. So maybe later, I will start on a remake.

Remake

I'm going to remake this book. Looking back at the first few chapters, I'm quite disappointed. I also don't like how this turned out. I mean, it's called Ashfur's Insanity, you would think that Ashfur would be some crazy murderer, but turns out he was getting controlled by Tigerstar this whole time. I think that what I wrote was dumb, so I'm going to write it in a better way. I can tell some people dropped this story (that's fine). This time, I'm going to make Ashfur *really* insane.